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The Editors
OUR LAST ELECTION?
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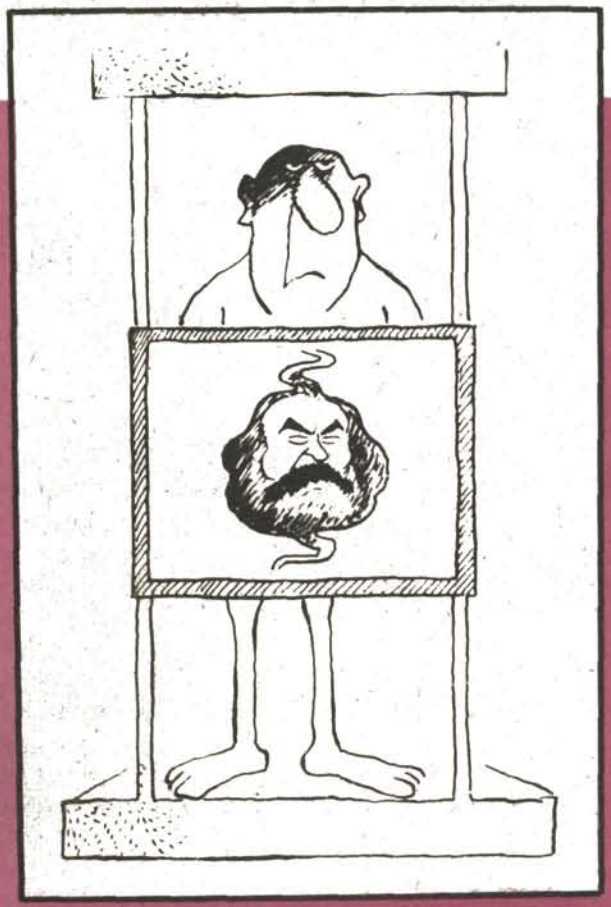

Are we entering a post-Marxist age?

JEAN-YVES CALVEZ
SHLOMO AVINERI
NORMAN BIRNBAUM

Also reviews by: *John Garvey, Frederick Ferré, Deborah Meier, Clyde F. Crews, Tom O'Brien.*

BREAKING ABORTION STEREOTYPES
SIDNEY CALLAHAN & DANIEL CALLAHAN

THE END OF CATHOLICISM? PART III
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Correspondence

Cheering the reflexes

Logansport, Ind.

To the Editors: Periodically *Commonweal* publishes an article that makes me want to stand up and cheer. John Garvey's "Religion and Reflex" [June 1] succinctly and beautifully presented an issue that has been nagging at me for many years.

Mr. Garvey writes of the value of reflex actions as "when you don't have to think of something, you have learned it." I would add that the reflex action also places one automatically in a receptive, prayerful state and makes possible a spiritual communication that no amount of self-conscious manipulation can produce.

I have become increasingly uncomfortable with the staged religious experience that is artfully designed to produce a "spiritual experience." These persons who preach total trust of one's emotions are the same ones who are contemptuous of our reflex responses.

Vatican II was a clean, fresh wind that revitalized the church, but in our enthusiasms we threw out some vitally important "babies" with the bath water. Starting in the '60s, we allowed ourselves to be bullied by the "relevant and meaningful" crowd, but I submit that many of us became closet conservatives and practiced our devotions privately.

Thanks to Mr. Garvey and similar apostles of sanity, we may hopefully have the courage to reclaim the devotional practices that will allow our faith to survive and flourish in these difficult times.

BILL McTAGGART

The Marxism question

Toronto, Canada

To the Editors: Please, allow me to disagree with the opinion my dear friend Francis Schüssler Fiorenza expressed in his article, "Gutiérrez and Ratzinger" [June 15]. Fiorenza claims that Gutiérrez has "taken over several key concepts of Marxist analysis" and that he has not taken into account "the neo-Marxist critique of orthodox Marxism." Francis, forgive me, but this is an awful exaggeration. It is, moreover, an exaggeration that could do Gutiérrez serious harm.

The social analysis that we find in Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation* is a generalized version of the theory of dependency. When this theory was first proposed by Gunder Frank, as Francis knows well, it was in opposition to orthodox Marxism. Since then dependency theory has taken on many different forms, some of which take into account only economic factors while others rely as well on cultural factors, including the ethical dimension. Gutiérrez abstracts from the debate among the theorists. He makes use of dependency theory only in a generalized way. He offers no detailed social analysis of Peruvian society nor of any other Latin American society. He uses dependency theory only to show that dependency has gravely harmed society economically, culturally, psychologically, and ultimately spiritually. In this generalized sense, this is accepted by all political scientists who study colonization from the viewpoint of the colonized. What follows from this for Gutiérrez is the need for self-reliant development. He thinks the church should be behind people's self-reliant development because it affects not only their economic well-being but also their cultural, psychological, and spiritual reality.

In this generalized sense, the theory of dependency has been adopted in many ecclesiastical documents. We find it in the Medellin Conclusions, especially in the section entitled "Peace." We find it in Puebla's Final Document. We find it in several Canadian pastoral letters, in particular in the 1979 pastoral statement of the Catholic bishops of the Canadian Atlantic Provinces, "To Establish a Kingdom of Justice." The theory of dependency and the call for self-reliant development are common in Canadian political science. They were proposed a long time ago, prior to Gunder Frank, by the Canadian political scientist Harold Innis, a liberal with no sympathy for left-wing politics, who accounted for the historical reality of Canadian society in terms of its economic dependencies on the colonial powers. He introduced the vocabulary of "hinterland" and "metropolis," and shows in detail how the various regions of Canada as hinterland were effected by their dependency on the economic and political power of the metropolis, first Great Britain, and later the United States.

To say that in making use of the theory of dependency Gutiérrez has taken over a key concept of Marxist analysis is an exaggeration.

Nor has Gutiérrez taken over "class struggle" in the Marxist sense of the word. He did not need European neo-Marxists to tell him that a theory which made the proletariat the principal agent of social change did not fit into Latin America where the great masses constitute a subproletariat, Marx's "Lumpen," and where the industrial workers, a relatively small sector, are divided in their loyalties. Gutiérrez's use of "class struggle," if one wants to use this term, is not Marxist at all. His struggle is defined not in economic terms by people's relation to production, but in political terms by the solidarity of the poor, joined by the solidarity of all who love justice. This solidarity struggle against oppressive structures is not simply defined by people's collective self-interest; it is an ethical achievement, it demands conversion, it unites the poor and members of other classes who are committed to justice.

This theory of preferential solidarity is also found in the documents of Medellin and Puebla. It is, moreover, endorsed in John Paul II's *Laborem exercens* (n. 8)

(Continued on page 540)

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'WILL THIS ELECTION BE OUR LAST?'

THROUGHOUT THIS CENTURY of dictatorships and wars, people in many lands have had to go the polls asking themselves "Will this election be our last?" That question is now pertinent to Americans. We do not pose it as an introduction to some rhetorical denunciation of the Reaganites as latent fascists or the Democrats as dangerous collectivists, one or other of the parties, or both, leading us down the road to serfdom. It is not the fact of Big Brother that looms over our society but the threat of another kind of tyranny: that of nuclear war. If the question, "Will the 1984 election be our last?" is shocking, good. For all reassurances to the contrary, and this campaign has dealt too generously in them, we live in a house with foundations built on sand, the pilings of our fifty thousand nuclear weapons shakily poised to pull asunder. Our civilization has relocated itself over the unsteady landfill of nuclear deterrence, a zone buffeted constantly by the forces of geo-political rivalries, eroded by the poverty of our neighbors downhill, and poisoned by an atmosphere of permanent distrust and collective heartsickness.

Yet there is hope — while there is life. This hope is not based on any deep confidence in the mechanism of deterrence; as the Irish bishops pointed out succinctly, "A permanent and complacent reliance on deterrence would be insane." Nor is our hope predicated on greater numbers of weapons, on the belief entertained out of habit by some Americans, even when they doubt it could withstand the light of examination, that the U.S. can "win" the arms race in some decisive sense. Nor is our hope to be found in more sophisticated technical weapons and anti-weapons systems, which as Leslie Gelb has pointed out, "fundamentally and irretrievably undermine even the notion of nuclear deterrence."

No, our hope is rooted elsewhere: in the possibility that cautious and precise intelligence can guide us through the immediate dangers of nuclear confrontation in the short run, and that a deepening human reflection can provoke a willingness among the peoples of the earth to undertake a profound human change in the long run.

So far, the 1984 election has displayed little of this intelligence, this reflection, this willingness. This is not to deny the sometimes fruitful discussion of church and state; the important attempts to examine the promise and perils of our current economic upswing; the occasional mention of international economic interdependence with the accompanying problems of shifting jobs, catastrophic debt, and world hunger; and the agonizing, necessary debate on abortion. But simply put, the campaign has failed as yet to address the central question of our time, one which envelops even the abortion issue, the question of whether we will extinguish our civilization if not our species in nuclear conflagration.

Too many Christians, Catholic bishops among them, have contributed to this massive evasion of responsibility. The overriding moral question for 1984, they

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Going on 60

From Commonweal forty years ago: "A significant battle is being waged here in America today between two types of character, the bigoted and the democratic. Shrewd and emotionally-roused representatives are busy on both sides. And social forces are working both ways.

". . . Clichés alone, however, do not create a bigot. He has to learn also to regard the world as a perilous jungle, where beasts devour one another or are devoured. Life is revealed to him not as an invitation to cooperation . . . but as an arena of struggle where opponents must be annihilated. Although he may be sprinkled with verbal pieties in church and school, he never really learns (in his nerves and muscles) that the purpose of a democratic society is to aid the socially acceptable possibilities of all people to reach fruition.

". . . People who have the character structure of the bigot embrace fascist principles and techniques to protect their prejudices. But they seldom realize that they are doing it. More likely they invoke democratic symbols to justify their attacks. . . . What people do not know is that fascism can come to this country under the banner of 'democracy.' "

—Gordon W. Allport, "The Bigot in Our Midst"
October 6, 1944

have argued, is abortion. When reminded of the agonized attention that the bishops devoted over several years to the moral dangers of nuclear weaponry, these spokespersons reply that such dangers, like nuclear war, are only "potential"; abortion is here and now. The distinction is only superficially accurate; it ignores an essential difference between the two moral questions. The only time that we *can* exercise our moral responsibility politically in regard to nuclear war is when it remains "potential." Do they suggest we postpone our debate and choices until the ten to twenty minutes while the missiles are flying?

Even more important in diminishing the importance of the nuclear issue in the election campaign has been the behavior of the Soviets. By breaking off negotiations, by continuing their nuclear buildup, by the very obscurity in which they create and conduct their policy, the Soviet leaders have made it difficult for American citizens to judge what, if any, alternative policies for the United States could really lead to a viable, even-handed relaxation of an arms race that is on the brink of vast new expenditures and vast new dangers.

Difficult but not impossible. There are significant differences on nuclear arms policy between the parties contending for leadership in the U.S. The Reagan administration has consistently displayed a distrustful attitude toward negotiations, an enthusiasm for new weapons, and a deliberate emphasis on the centrality of military force. While disclaiming any desire to reestablish U.S. nuclear superiority, the administration remains acutely sensitive to the marginal psychological advantage it believes either superpower can draw from the momentum of the arms race. Such advantages certainly appear to outweigh, in administration eyes, the dangers of destabilization. Against this outlook, the Democrats are hardly peaceniks or military budget-slashers. They do believe that even minor gains in arms negotiations are positive — the White House has tended to see them as contributing more to illusions than peace. The Democrats can be counted on to look longer and harder at all new strategic weapons systems, and to be more inhibited generally about the engagement of U.S. military power. William Safire, a Reagan booster, put the difference cleverly when he wrote of Mondale, "He would raise taxes as a first resort and use force as a last resort at a time when most Americans [read, taking their cue from Mr. Reagan] prefer force as a first resort and taxes as a last resort."

Talk of using force as a first resort or a last one should have some important resonance for Catholics who recall just-war doctrine. But Mr. Reagan can no doubt argue the case that his forcefulness serves the peace, both in the short run and over the long haul. The shame is that he hasn't really had to. The issues of war and peace, especially of nuclear policy, have simply not been dealt with seriously in this campaign.

There is good evidence that the American people would have it otherwise. According to a recent study, *Voter Options on Nuclear Arms Policy*, seventy-seven percent of the public reject the idea that "the subject of nuclear weapons is too complex for people like me to think about; that it should be left to the president and the experts." The same study shows that voters are anxious to stop what they see as a present drift toward nuclear confrontation. They accept the Soviets as tough adversaries, but they desire a new phase in Soviet-American relations. (Three out of four Americans believe the danger of nuclear war is not remote but urgent, and a similar number believe that the U.S. shares some of the blame for our bad relations with Moscow.) In this sense, the meetings of the president and the Soviet foreign minister are a response to a widely perceived need.

Voter Options does more than report on voter sentiment. Compiled jointly by the Public Agenda Foundation and the Center for Foreign Policy Development at Brown University (6 East 39th Street, New York, N.Y., 10016, $6, 91 pp.), it also clearly describes American strategic policy and gradations of expert opinion on arms and foreign policy. It demonstrates that the technical components of the nuclear arms issue cannot be neatly divided from the political components. Nor, we might add, from the moral components.

But most American voters won't learn that from booklets. They will learn it only when candidates for office, religious leaders, reporters, and the organizers of television debates fulfill their responsibilities. We are told not to fear those who can kill the body but those who can kill the spirit as well. There is no surer path to that latter fate than to evade addressing the truth that faces us: we have in our hands the means for our entire civilization's, and perhaps for all humankind's, annihilation. It is in relation to this truth that all other campaign issues must take their rightful and serious place.

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CHURCH & CUOMO

Permit us to add our appreciation to Governor Mario Cuomo for his address, "Religious Belief and Public Morality: a Catholic Governor's Perception," delivered September 13 at the University of Notre Dame. Rigorously, candidly, and intelligently, the governor treated a highly controversial concern within both the Catholic church and the body politic: the relationship between specific moral principles and the public morality supported by policy and law. He courageously risked what few politicians will in this age of TV clips — complexity.

Governor Cuomo's central thesis is that even the most-agreed-upon moral principles can be translated into a variety of political strategies. As a Catholic Cuomo upholds the moral teachings of the Catholic church, but on issues of policy, he uses his own prudential, political judgment. The key to understanding how this judgment works is in the concept of consensus.

For example, while agreeing with the bishops that fetal life is to be respected, hence, abortion is to be avoided, Mr. Cuomo disagrees with the bishops' public support for legislation to prohibit abortion. His grounds are pragmatic: lack of consensus in society would make enforcement a nightmare akin to Prohibition, even jeopardizing respect for law in general; withholding funds (state or federal) for abortion would only burden the "already disadvantaged"; state bans would mean inconsistent application of the law; abortion is not a failure of government, so its remedy should not be sought there.

But is consensus as impossible as it seems to Mr. Cuomo? Is there not some point, at least in the later development of fetal life, after which we as a society could agree that abortion is to be disallowed? Are there not some difficult circumstances upon which we might agree that it be permitted? If consensus is so unlikely how is it, we wonder, that President Reagan has garnered such support? The president's success suggests that *Roe v. Wade* is far from the center of gravity of public opinion.

Furthermore, the quest for consensus raises the problem of leadership. When is one to launch out and break the new ground of social morality? We admire Governor Cuomo's willingness to stand against consensus on the issue of capital punishment. We recognize that the analogy is imperfect, but what hampers him from leading similarly on the issue of

RUNNING SCARED

R.I.P. JIM FIXX

AT MY AGE, you start thinking about figures of speech like "alive and well" or "alive and kicking." At my age, Bill Russell and John Havlicek had retired. If you are still playing a big league sport in your late thirties, like Tom Seaver, you're reminded how old you are every time you burp. "Thirty-nine-year-old Tom Seaver blanked the Red Sox on three hits. . . ."

At my age, friends you haven't seen in a while greet you, "Bob! You're lookin' good!" When we were twenty-eight, nobody said that because "you're lookin' good!" doesn't mean "you're lookin' good." It means you look okay for somebody thirty-eight-years-old.

At my age, John Keats had been dead thirteen years.

A lot of guys my age run. We figure on leading longer, healthier lives. We don't mind little jokes like: "Whenever I feel the need to exercise, I lie down until it passes. Ha-ha-ha." Let eagles, whales, and fat cynics be the endangered species. We put on our Nikes, put in sixty-miles-a-week on the asphalt — and feel invincible; more powerful than a locomotive; able to leap tall buildings in a single bound! Okay, maybe not. But at least alive and kicking.

Suddenly Jim Fixx, the king of the road, the genius of jogging, the apostle of running died. He was not run over. He did not die of terminal hemorrhoids. Big Jim dropped dead of a heart attack while he was cruising along a quiet Vermont road feeling no pain, taking in the sights and sounds . . . WHAMMO!

Being a Type-A person, the sudden death of Jim Fixx made me a little nervous. I decided I'd better have a physical exam. I needed something to boost my morale, and a stress test is part of a physical. With all the running I do, I figured I'd do pretty well on the stress test. I always liked doing well on tests; that's how I ended up a teacher.

My doctor is a real mellow guy. He doesn't run. He waits. He takes things as they come. He farms. When I casually mentioned that Jim Fixx had suddenly dropped dead yesterday and asked for a physical examination that afternoon, he told me not to worry. It's advice people often give me.

"Whadd'ya mean, don't worry? Jim Fixx wasn't worried. Look where it got him!"

"He had a terrible family history. He might have died ten years ago if he hadn't been running. The only definite factors are smoking and family history. You don't smoke, and you can't change your family history. What are you going to do if we detect some slight blockage — have triple coronary by-pass surgery?"

"No, but I might give up Häagen-Dazs vanilla swiss almond."

"It's also possible that stress is a factor. Don't worry so much. You're doing what you can."

I was completely calmed by this consultation with my doctor. From now on, I'm not going to worry about my heart. According to the latest medical research, it should last me the rest of my life.

ROBERT BELL

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abortion? He rightly called upon the church to teach by example; but even short of restrictive legislation, isn't there more a prominent Democratic like Cuomo could do to move his party away from its one-sided stance on this issue?

While Mr. Cuomo made clear his belief that abortion is a life and death issue, placing it among other life and death issues, we wished he had been stronger in his statements. Finally, we regret the almost built-in "Catholicizing" effect of Mr. Cuomo's talk, delivered as a Catholic to a Catholic audience. While we don't know how it could have been avoided, such a narrow purview distorts the issues a bit, however unintentionally.

As a whole, we hope the governor's labor may prove to be as fruitful as it was painstaking. The governor has set a precedent for some bishop(s) to distinguish as clearly as he did the distinction between adherence to moral teachings and acceptance of particular political measures proposed by the teachers. We hope that both those who agree and those who disagree with Mr. Cuomo on the particulars of abortion legislation will heed the example of one who has moved a public debate beyond slogans, fingerpointing, and electioneering.

THE END IS NEAR

"The conversation has just begun." So David Tracy concludes his latest contribution to the discussion on "The End of Catholicism?" originally provoked by an article by Thomas Sheehan. Tracy is right. On the other hand, this mere beginning has already run to roughly twenty-five thousand words in these pages. We feel obliged to call a halt — at least for the time being. We are not running out of interest, only out of space.

A pity. For one thing, amid the sparks of this controversy, real light has been shed. For another, we do not like risking unfairness to Professor Sheehan, who may have reason to see himself the victim of the old tough-cop-nice-cop routine: "You're a slippery fellow and don't know what you're talking about," says Officer Greeley and bangs Sheehan one over the noggin with his nightstick; "Ah, you're a fine Heidegger scholar, Tom," says Detective Tracy with a smile, "Don't you think it's time to come home?"

But Sheehan will get his day in court. He has two books — one on Karl Rahner and one on the origins of Christianity about to appear. Certainly those may provide occasions for carrying on the discussion. For the moment, we find his description of the "liberal consensus" in Catholic theology accurate in about as limited a sense as it is accurate to describe *Moby Dick* as a book about a white whale. We find disconcerting his tendency to launch his own distinctly post-Christian agnosticism from the basis of his sympathetic exposition and even defense of Catholic thinking (most recently of liberation theology) when in fact his position requires a definite "leap" of its own, which — so far — he has not explained or defended. We hope he does, and when he does, we suspect it will be done with depth as well as brio. Contrary to the impression sometimes given in any controversy, the differences here are not among individuals suffering from any intellectual defects but among individuals willing to confront tough problems over which even equally thoughtful and competent thinkers can part company. Our thanks to them all for their contributions.

Of several minds: *John Garvey*

AMBIVALENT HERITAGE?

BEYOND THE CATECHISM CONTROVERSY

WHAT SHOULD AN adult catechism be like? Can it never be ambivalent? How should it regard tradition and orthodoxy? These were questions that I raised at the end of my last column on the controversy surrounding *Christ Among Us* and the criticism of that book put forward by Catholics United for the Faith. From CUF's point of view, of course, there can be no ambivalence; whatever comes from Rome is absolutely to be accepted, and where Rome has spoken — even where it has not made its teaching a matter of faith by declaring it to be said *ex cathedra* — there can be no more discussion or speculation. From this point of view, the ordinary teaching authority of Rome is to be accepted as if it were infallible, even if it is not.

On the other side, there is a vague direction which finds the idea of orthodoxy itself intolerable. A recent article in the *National Catholic Reporter* spoke with approval of a suggestion that the Creed might be dropped from the Mass to make things a bit easier for doubtful people. I have met priests who do not believe in the Resurrection except in an allegorical sense, and priests who believe that the Mass is a memorial of Christ's presence rather than a present realization of it.

Now it is true that the authority of bishops can be abused, and the attempt to place all of the episcopal authority finally in the lap of Rome doesn't work, historically, if what you want is consistent orthodoxy. But the fact is that from the time of the earliest ecumenical councils until the relatively recent past, the bishop was seen as the guardian of orthodoxy, and the work of councils was to show that what the church confessed with one voice in its creeds was consistent with the prayer and worship and professed belief of Christians back to the time of the Apostles. If history makes the simplicities of Catholics United for the Faith hard to sustain, the way in which Christians have regarded tradition should make some of their opponents more humble. There is a modern attitude

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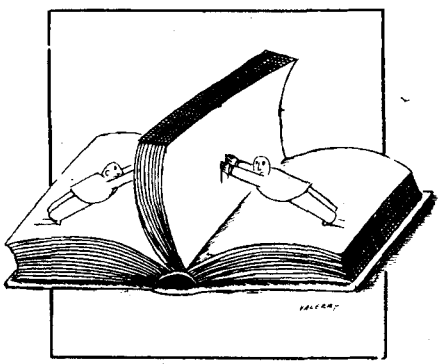
which regards the whole of the Christian tradition at arm's length, as if our own perceptions were not as limited by our time as our ancestors' perceptions were limited by theirs. What orthodoxy has meant, in both the Eastern and Western churches, is a faith that, despite those limitations, it is possible to discern a continuity, and not only a continuity which can be traced by intellectual historians, but which can be found as living in the faith and the prayers of the people.

To take a topic which makes most contemporaries uncomfortable — the existence of angels — it can be said that one of the liberal objections to it has been the fact that other religions (especially Zoroastrianism and Hinduism) believed in angels and demons; and here we come to a sort of unwritten "therefore." Therefore, they must be the products of superstition, or merely cultural artifacts.

Here I reveal myself as a neo-traditionalist. First of all, monasticism, contemplation, and an incredibly sophisticated psychology are all features of Buddhism. A reverent approach to the body and a non-puritanical approach to sexuality can be found in Hinduism. Zoroastrianism speaks with profound moral authority about the need for justice. None of these things is rejected — they all fit into a view of the world most of us find comfortable. Angels, demons, and miracles do not. Monasticism comes close to our affection for the idea of "simple living" — but if a monk talks about angels or demons people begin getting itchy. They always have; in the most traditional settings angels had to tell people "be not afraid," and demons were never comfortable figures, like garden gnomes. Not knowing anything about the real place of angels or demons, we know that they are the products of a credulous age. Because other aspects of that age accord with what we would like to believe (because what we would like to believe is what makes us feel most at home with ourselves and our ideas about the way the universe is supposed to work), we do not criticize them; in fact we are amazed at the enlightenment of our ancestors, who despite their belief were able to grasp the importance of topics which really mattered!

The arrogance of this attitude ought to be apparent. It could be that there is something in the habit of contemporary thought which does not appreciate something previous generations and other cultures could appreciate. We could be missing something which matters very much. And it could be an anxiety about this, a sense of this missing dimension,



which leads some people to think that the Catholics United for the Faith may have something going for them. I think they are looking for certainty, which is not at all the same thing as wisdom. But Wilhelm's attitude, balanced as it tries to be, is marked by a distance from traditional understanding — a distance which, it could be argued, is inevitable for many of us. However, there is something too easy in this passage from *Christ Among Us* which deals with angels and devils: "Today, theology is restudying the whole question of angels and devils. Perhaps Scripture simply presupposes angels and devils as part of the biblical milieu, rather than affirming their actual existence as part of God's revelation. Nor does the existence of angels and devils seem to be a part of the strictly dogmatic teaching of the church. . . . Also, in a time of simpler religious belief, the devil became for some a convenient, excusing cause of their own sins. And yet it is hard to dismiss totally the reality of an evil, superhuman intelligence, so firmly rooted is it in the long tradition and liturgy of the church, and in the experience and literature of many cultures."

What is too easy here is, first of all, the assumption that our ancestors lived in a time of "simpler religious belief." There is also the clean cut between the idea of personal evil and the existence of something or someone which feeds on destruction, as if our own sins have an origin which is merely personal, a quirky and entirely personal origin (and therefore one which doesn't require much radical help). It is "hard to dismiss . . . totally" this possibility. I must say that in the century which includes the murder of so many millions I am glad that it is not easy to dismiss it totally.

THE *CHRIST AMONG US* controversy has done us all a favor, by revealing a problem which needs to be dealt with more carefully and sensitively than it has been to date. That is the problem of determining what the sources of Catholic orthodoxy should be. The CUF approach will not work. A look at the history of doctrine shows its inadequacies from a doctrinal point of view, and it will not be accepted in practice by the majority of the laity, the clergy, and (I would suspect) the episcopacy.

But the liberal theological response is not necessarily the best answer to the CUF extreme. What I am about to say amounts to an intuitive and less than complete response to much of what I find in contemporary theology and biblical scholarship, and no doubt all sorts of counterexamples will spring to the minds of people who are better-read in these areas than I am. I do, anyway, have the feeling that many writers accept a more or less secular distance between themselves and the tradition which is theirs as a heritage, but not necessarily a heritage which has led them to view it from within. A distance which can allow a believer to judge something which has been for generations of believers a lively and present belief with the detachment which might be expected of an anthropologist is a secular distance. Secularism, in the words of the late Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann, is "a lie about the world." To assume that a secular point of view is correct — that is to say, a perspective which can ignore or put into second place the meaning which particular teachings have in fact had for a community over two thousand years — is to make tradition not a living language, but something already dead and fossilized.

JOHN GARVEY

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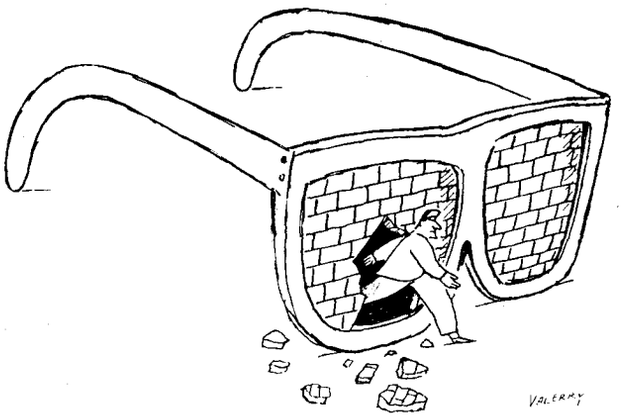
A SURPRISING SIDE OF THE ABORTION DEBATE



Breaking through the stereotypes

SIDNEY CALLAHAN
& DANIEL CALLAHAN

APART FROM some of the nastier reasons people impute to each other, just why is it that there are such profound differences about abortion? For at least twenty years now we have asked that question of each other, just as we have asked how our own differences and those of others might be reconciled. Ever since the topic of abortion became of interest to us, in the 1960s, we have disagreed. Well over half of our thirty years of marriage have been marked (though rarely marred) by an ongoing argument. For all of that period, one of us (Daniel) has taken a pro-choice position and the other (Sidney) a pro-life position (to use, somewhat reluctantly, the common labels).

At one time, while Daniel was writing a book on the subject, we talked about it every day for four years. Thereafter, Sidney wrote a number of articles on abortion, some of which would be xeroxed and distributed by pro-life protestors at Daniel's lectures. Whether observers made the connection between the two Callahans was not always clear, but we experienced the conflict first-hand. Over the years, every argument, every statistic, every historical example cited in the literature has been discussed between us. As Eliza Doolittle of *My Fair Lady* says about "words": "There's not a one I haven't heard."

Yet we continue to disagree. How can that be? Our desire to better understand our own differences and those of others led us not long ago to organize a small research project at The Hastings Center, supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation. As a social psychologist, Sidney had earlier investigated the differing views and personal characteristics people have about the making and keeping of promises. She found that the moral stance one takes on that common moral problem reflects deep and pervasive premises about the self and the world. In Daniel's work on biomedical ethics, he has similarly observed that people bring to specific moral issues their broad outlooks toward themselves and the world; but those outlooks are often not immediately apparent on the surface of their conventional arguments and moral stances.

Why not, we thought, look at the problem by considering the different ways in which abortion opponents understand themselves and the world? How do they bring that wider and deeper understanding to bear on this difficult, divisive issue? Many people, we reluctantly suspect, are not greatly interested in understanding in some sympathetic way why abortion is so divisive an issue. To recall Karl Marx's expression, they want to change the world not understand it. In the larger political arena, it is victory that counts. But given the depth and apparent intractability of abortion differences, we think that in the long run most persons in the society will have to find a way to live with differences.

Our project, therefore, sought to see if we could provide some better insight into how individuals weigh and order their values when dealing with abortion. Though they came up from time to time, we did not directly deal with the most common issues in the abortion debate — when does life begin? What should the law be? and so on — but instead with the way in which abortion as a problem is situated within the terrain of a person's general, more encompassing values. We hoped that, if we could not entirely escape the common forms of sociological or psychological reductionism, we might at least bring to them some greater complexity and penetration. We sought only understanding, not a compromise solution, a consensus position, or a political recommendation.

A few other decisions gave the project its final shape. With the exception of Daniel, all of the other participants would be women. (See box, p. 524). They would be equally drawn from the pro-choice and the pro-life side. And they would focus their discussion on four broad themes: feminism, the family, childbearing and childrearing, and the political and cultural

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nature of our society. Those topics, we believe, provide for many in our society the background framework of values that often shape abortion attitudes.

Finally, although we wanted a group that was evenly divided on the moral and political issues, we also wanted one that could effectively talk and work together. Thus there was no pretense that the group would be representative of all the ethnic, religious, political, and cultural groups active in the abortion debate. But it was to be representative of one important, if sometimes overlooked, group — those women who, though they differ, are willing to talk with those on the other side, willing to make the effort to empathize with those who hold opposing views, and willing to see if they can find some shared ground to keep their dialogue alive. The results of our discussion were sufficient to persuade us that a more complex, nuanced, and fruitful argument is possible. That argument is more fully laid out in the book we edited as an outcome of the project *Abortion: Understanding Differences* (Plenum Press, 1984).

The general debate has seen an effort, on all sides, to make abortion fit into some overall coherent scheme of values, one that combines personal convictions and consistency with more broadly held social values. Abortion poses a supreme test in trying to achieve that coherence. It stands at the juncture of a number of value systems, all of which continually joust with each other for dominance, but none of which by itself can do full justice to all the values that, with varying degrees of insistence and historical rootedness, clamor for attention and respect. Here we will try to present a composite picture of the positions presented at our meetings. Not all of the participants may have perceived the discussion the way we did, but we think the following account would gain general support.

THE VALUES that sustain and give theoretical legitimacy to both the pro-life and pro-choice movements are commonplace and command widespread respect. Neither has invented unusual moral principles nor idiosyncratic values. Consider first the pro-life position. It is committed to respect for an individual's right to life, even if that right is uncertain or in doubt in borderline cases (or even if there is doubt about whether it is "life"); the need to protect the weak and powerless, at the least in order to preserve them from the harm that can be done by the more powerful, and at the most to provide them with an opportunity to develop their full potential; the legitimacy of writing moral convictions and principles into law, particularly when that seems necessary to protect the rights of others (as in the civil rights movement); the value, not of fatalism but of accepting accidents and mischance as a part of life, and a denial of violent solutions as a way out of such vicissitudes; an obligation on the part of the community, whether through mediating institutions or the state, to provide support for those whose troubles (for example, an unwanted pregnancy) might lead them to forced, destructive choices; and, finally, the conviction that moral values and ideals toward nascent life should be upheld even at the cost of individual difficulties and travail.

The values that were identified as integral to the pro-life position are a mixture of those ordinarily labeled "liberal" and "conservative." The pro-life movement cannot, in its essence, be reduced to a simple conservative nostalgia or backlash, however much that may characterize some of its activist leaders and many of its mainline features. In the formulations of some, it can just as well go in a recognizably liberal direction. What probably most distinguishes it in that rendering from the more garden varieties of liberalism is its willingness to live with — and accept — externally imposed tragedy as a part of life. That has not been a traditional part of secular liberalism, which has always been far more inclined toward instrumental rationality than the version that has surfaced in the pro-life movement. The liberal community itself, however, has engaged in some sharp criticism of the part of its tradition that has stressed "rationalization" (a rational socially engineered solution to personal and political problems) and "emancipation" (freedom from the restraint of society and rejection of moral traditions). Hence, not only can the pro-life movement make a strong claim to upholding many traditional liberal values, it can also (in some important formulations) lay claim to reflecting some recent developments intrinsic to liberalism's self-definition.

The pro-choice movement can lay an equally strong claim to an important piece of the American and Western tradition. By stressing freedom of choice, it gives centrality to the sovereignty of the individual conscience, especially in cases of moral doubt. It also recognizes a closely related principle: that those who must personally bear the burden of their moral choices ought to have the right to make those choices. By its emphasis on the unique burden of women in pregnancy and childrearing it has fostered the enfranchisement of women in controlling their own destinies. In its polity, the pro-choice movement is at one with that recently emergent tradition that would free procreational choices from the control of the state and, more generally, give the benefit of uncertainty in matters of conscience to the individual rather than the government. Its recognition of the injustice inherent in the known pattern of illegal abortion — that of *de facto* discrimination in favor of the affluent and the powerful — makes an important contribution to a more just society. Through its concern for choice and control in procreation, it has focused attention on parental responsibility, helping to remove childbearing from the realm of biological chance and sexual inevitability. By sundering a once necessary relationship between sexual activity and procreation, it helps provide an adaptation to a world that no longer needs, nor can afford, unlimited childbearing.

Just as the pro-life movement can be said to have its conservative and liberal wings, the same is true of the pro-choice movement. In its libertarian formulation, it is heavily weighted toward the maximization of individual choice and the privatization of moral judgment. The basic concern is not so much with the social and economic conditions under which choices are made, or with the ethical criteria by which they ought to be made, but solely with preserving the right to make a choice. But that is not the only pro-choice formulation. In a

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different rendering — what might be called liberal communitarianism — the pro-choice movement recognizes that a socially forced choice in favor of abortion is not a fully free choice; that a lack of communal, economic, and social support often coerces an abortion that would not be necessary in a more just society; that private moral choices are subject to moral judgments and standards; and that what ought to be an inherently difficult tragic choice can easily be trivialized and routinized — tacitly sanctioned and advanced by a society that promotes narcissism, prefers technological fixes to structural change, and is all too happy to see abortion put to the service of reducing welfare burdens.

There are, we think, two different abortion debates now taking place, one of them tense, open and familiar, the other more relaxed, less public, and surprising in some of its features. At one level, there is the fairly primitive, monochromatic struggle that takes place between the most public and vociferous activists on both sides. Kristin Luker's research on those groups (presented in our project before its appearance in book form in *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, has vividly laid out the background values and assumptions that animate their convictions. There is a pro-life movement dedicated to the preservation of the nuclear family, the centrality of childbearing in the life of women, and a religious rather than a secular view of life. As a mirror image of that movement, there is a pro-choice ideology dedicated to female emancipation from the body and a repressive nuclear family, a subordination of childbearing to other personal goals, a celebration of rational control of self in place of the acceptance of fate, and a secular rather than a religious view of life.

At that level, the debate admits of no accommodation. It is a living out, in bold relief, of the struggle between modernity and traditionalism that has been waged since at least the age of the Enlightenment. For both the pro-choice modernizers and the pro-life traditionalists, abortion serves as a perfect symbol for such pervasive issues as the roles and rights of the sexes, the family, the relationship between law and morality, the nature and malleability of social reality, and the place of reason and choice in human life. But by choosing to cast the issues in those fundamental terms, and by making abortion carry the weight of a Manichean-like struggle between the good (evil) past and the good (evil) present, each side has doomed itself to an utter inability to talk with the other side, the likelihood that neither side can wholly triumph in the future, and the disheartening prospect of never-ending, never-decided civil strife for everyone else.

FOR ALL of those reasons, it is the debate at the other level that bears attention, cultivation, and development. Our own project discussions manifested some traits significantly different from those sketched above. Four features of that discussion are worth noting.

The first, already alluded to, is that participants from each side combined both liberal and conservative, modernizing and traditionalist, ingredients in their respective positions. Each side is uncomfortable with the more stark options and tight combinations of values pursued at the extremes of the debate. They thus felt free — and indeed, in many ways, compelled — to appropriate and adapt from both poles, to fashion a different kind of synthesis. Both, strikingly, borrow from the various civil-rights struggles of the recent past. The pro-life groups point out that a fundamental aim of the civil rights efforts was to protect and give voice to those without power — to give them an equal moral standing in the community. For them, the task is to extend to the fetus the rights won by women and racial minority groups; fetal rights are not inherently hostile to women's rights. The pro-choice groups, sensitive to the deprivations of women who are given no options in their reproductive lives, want to provide women with a choice about something central to their lives. Yet, though they may differ about the meaning of the various civil-rights struggles, those battles serve as a common reference point for both. Most critically, neither side finds the understanding and interpretation of the other outlandish or implausible.

Second, both sides tended to share a distrust of that form of libertarianism that would wholly sunder the individual from the community, setting up the private self as an isolated agent bound by no moral standards other than those perceived or devised by the agent. In this, they not only share some of the conservative and neoconservative critiques of liberalism, but share as well a similar questioning that has become part of the liberal tradition itself, whether from Marxist or other sources. They are, however, hardly less distrustful of that form of traditionalism that believes the past must be preserved in all of its purity. They want to be able to use the past selectively, preserving what remains valuable, rejecting what has been either harmful or wholly overtaken by time, and in general seeing the past as a resource requiring constant adjustment and adaptation for life in the present.

Third, they are uncomfortable with the labels *pro-life* and *pro-choice*. Those terms, they are well aware, were devised for polemical and political purposes, not for carefully nuanced distinctions. *Pro-life* is misleading because it begs the ques-

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tion of what actually serves human life and welfare; *pro-choice* is not less misleading because it begs the question of whether freedom of choice ought to be made an ultimate moral value, regardless of the nature of the choice to be exercised. Put another way, *pro-life* begs the question of moral means. The labels are also disliked because of a suggestion that one must be wholly one or the other. But the more complex reality is that many in the pro-life group will not condemn out of hand all women who have abortions; and many in the pro-choice group are repelled by the banal moral arguments used to justify many abortions. Neither group, in short, is happy when *pro-life* or *pro-choice* seem to require a *reductio ad absurdum*, or inflexible, insensitive moral rules, to be pursued regardless of consequence.

Fourth, both sides are concerned about the conditions that lead or drive women to abortions, and about the social, economic, and cultural contexts of abortion decisions. They rejected, on the one hand, that rendering of the pro-life position that construes all choices in favor of abortion as merely personal convenience or crass expediency; and, on the other, that version of the pro-choice position that is interested only in the easy availability of abortion, regardless of cause or motivation. They are willing to pursue together an understanding of ways to limit a forced choice of abortion because of poverty or the oppression of women, or lack of social support for childbearing; and they are no less willing to pursue together those social reforms that would be more supportive of troubled pregnancies.

Why, then, sharing so much in their beliefs about how the abortion problem should be understood, and sharing some mutual criticisms of the assumptions and premises of those who fight at what we have called the first level, do they still differ? In part, they can differ because of the relative weight they give to various considerations; ever so faintly tilting one way or another can be decisive when the political and legal choices are so narrow. But in the end it came down, we think, to what is perhaps one of the most profound and subtle value differences of all. That is the matter of one's general hopes and beliefs about the world, human nature, and reality. Put simply, for many who are pro-choice, abortion is a necessary evil, one that must be tolerated and supported until such time as better sex education, more effective contraception, and a more just social order make possible fewer troubled pregnancies. And even then, there will still be some justifiable reasons for abortion; it will never disappear. For the pro-life group, it is a ban on abortion that must be the necessary evil, one that must be advanced as a long-term step in devising a social order that is more supportive of women and childbearing, more dedicated to an eradication of violence as a solution to personal or social threats.

Both sides, then, are prepared to agree that abortion is undesirable, a crude solution to problems that would better be solved by other means. The crucial difference, however, is that those on the pro-choice side believe that the world as it is must be acknowledged, and not just as it might or ought to be. Here and now, in our present social reality, there are women who need or desire abortions. Future solutions to the general problem of abortion, at some unspecified date, will do them no good. They have to live with the reality they encounter. They cannot be asked to bear personally the burden of helping to create a better future, which, even if possible, is not within their individual power to bring about. By contrast, the pro-life group believes that a better future cannot be achieved unless we begin now to live the ideals that we want to achieve, unless we are prepared to make present sacrifices toward future goals, and unless aggression toward the fetus is denied, however high the individual cost of denying it. The acceptance of reality as it is implicitly legitimates the *status quo*, undercuts efforts to bring about social change, and sanctions violence as an acceptable method of coping with problems.

Differences of that kind run deeply, pitting fundamentally discrepant attitudes and predispositions against each other. The dichotomies are expressed in our ordinary language when "idealists" are contrasted with "realists," or when the "hard-nosed" are pitted against the "starry-eyed." The liberal pro-life group, it sometimes seems, favors the equivalent of unilateral disarmament on abortion, and is willing to bear the hazards of a stance that will put many women at risk of disaster. They are willing to make a moral bet that the violence inherent in abortion will, in the long run, be repudiated. The public, they think, will eventually respond to the principled witness of those who reject it. The pro-choice group, for its part, is hesitant to indulge hopes of that kind. They are unwilling to ask women to give up a viable solution to their present problems in the name of a yet-to-be future, one that might never come.

PERHAPS the most striking outcome of our project was the way it broke many stereotypes. Too often it is assumed that a commitment to feminism entails a pro-choice position; but that is only one version of feminism, not necessarily its essence. Too often it is assumed that a commitment to the family as an enduring value entails a prohibition of abortion; but that does not follow either. Too often it is assumed that a pro-choice stand entails treating children as disposable goods, of value only if wanted. But that is too often a parody of the genuine affirmation of the value of children that can be a central part of a pro-choice position. Too often it is assumed that a society which values the rights of individuals must deny the value of community and thus any social restrictions on abortion choices; but in some renderings a denial of abortion can be a way of affirming rights.

There is no suggestion here that the differences are any less sharp than ever, or to deny that even slight differences can have a significant social impact. It is only to suggest that the relationship of abortion to such deeper values as feminism, the family, childrearing, and the political culture are open to more flexible, interesting possibilities than has been apparent in much of the public debate. If our own domestic wrangles have not led to a general shift in position for either of us, it has nonetheless been valuable. Neither of us has remained unchanged by the other.

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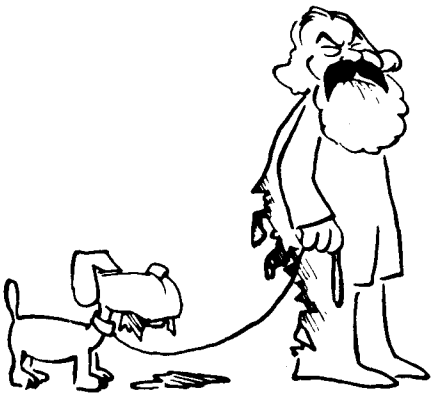
THREE MARXIAN SCHOLARS LOOK TO THE FUTURE



Are we entering a post-Marxist age?

LAST YEAR marked the centenary of Karl Marx's death. When he died in London in March 1883 only eleven people attended the funeral. Today, half the world's population is led or governed in Marx's name. Yet, as the centenary celebrations closed, there was evident a widespread significant sentiment that Marx is no longer an authority for our time: that we stand on the threshold of a new era which is not one envisioned by Marx, and which has found no student or forecaster of Marx's stature. Yet, today Marx appears to be better known and more widely studied in universities than at any time since he began his intellectual career in the 1840's. In publishing, Marx has become an academic industry. And there is also the influence of Marxist analysis on Catholic liberation theology.

But does Marx live outside the college classroom and the reflections of third-world theologians? In Eugene Kamenka's judgment (*New York Times Book Review*, April, 1984), Marx has become simply a figure in the history of ideas: most of what is valuable in his thought has now been absorbed; his predictions have proved half-right and half-wrong, but wrong where it matters most to Marxists; "He has become the lazy thinker's escape from hard work and uncertainty."

These considerations, along with a long-standing involvement in research related to issues of religion and society, prompted the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University to sponsor a symposium in April 1984 on the question: "Are we entering a post-Marxist age?" The speakers were three internationally recognized Marxian scholars: Jean-Yves Calvez, S.J., Shlomo Avineri, and Norman Birnbaum. The following discussion is based on edited versions of their conference presentations.

THOMAS M. GANNON, S.J.

(Thomas M. Gannon, S.J., is director of the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University.)

JEAN-YVES CALVEZ

My answer: 'No, but . . .'

THE QUESTION before us is: are we entering a post-Marxist age? My answer will be neither a simple yes or no, but rather something like, "no, but . . . ."

One reason for my caution is that one must be very careful today about forecasting a definitive decline in the influence of Marxism, even while admitting there are signs pointing in such a direction. The century separating us from Marx's death and the more than sixty-five years since the Soviet revolution reveal a pattern neither of steady growth nor of steady decline in Marxist influence. It is a history of ups and downs.

In France, for example, I have witnessed a number of these fluctuations since the Second World War. At the end of the war and through the early 1950s interest in Marx and in Marxism was intense, followed by a period of decline. It revived in the early 1960s with the publication of Louis Althusser's *Pour Marx*, a manifesto for a new brand of Marxism adapted to the emergence of structuralism. In the universities this revival culminated in May 1968, and there followed first a slow, then rapid decline. In the late 1970s, the "new philosophers" solemnly burned the idols they had earlier adored (and a few more things at the same time).

In all this history, the major factors contributing to growth or decline in Marxist influence are political rather than intellectual, and the Marxism generally referred to is Marxism-Leninism. This distinction is especially pertinent to any consideration of upcoming Marxist revolutions today, specifically, in Latin America. The tendency to separate Marx from Lenin (and even from Engels) was typical of some West European intellectuals before and after World War II, principally, the Frankfurt School in Germany, and later, non-orthodox Marxian thinkers in France like Maximillien Rubel, Dionisious Mascolo, Kostas Axelos, and even Henri Lefebvre. More recently, however, it is the Marxist-Leninist brand of Marxism that has become dominant. Generally speaking, then, whatever post-Marxism one can observe today is really a post-Marxism-Leninism.

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The question of whether or not we are entering a post-Marxist age is being asked because signs point towards a decline in Marxist influence. In France that decline is evident not only in intellectual circles but also in the political sphere (even in the Communist party itself). Interestingly, President François Mitterrand took the time to deliver an address on Teilhard de Chardin at the UNESCO meeting honoring the centenary of Teilhard's birth in 1981; he did not deliver one in 1983 at a similar symposium on the centenary of Marx's death. Indeed, Marx Year 1983 was a remarkably muted and uninspiring event, the occasion for rather formal, obligatory, and dull celebrations; nowhere could one find any outburst of enthusiasm or any discussion of "new discoveries" which one heard in 1967 at the 100th anniversary of the publication of the first volume of *Capital*. In fact, the East Germans did better for the Luther anniversary in 1983 than they did for Marx. There are also symptoms of continuing political crisis, linked to a decline in Marxist influence, within the East European bloc, in China, and in some parts of the third world.

THESE BRIEF and general observations lead me to four specific conclusions. First, it is very difficult to imagine that Marxism could once again be an occasion for the kind of authentic messianic outburst that first occurred in Russia with the Soviet revolution and, subsequently, had influence throughout Europe until Stalin's death in 1953. Today, even the Latin American countries where Marxism is still influential (and I include Nicaragua) do not experience that mood of total newness which was felt during the initial years of the Soviet revolution.

Second, Marxism will most likely continue to inspire the more down-to-earth revolutions which can still be expected in some third-world countries as a reaction to post-independence or to bourgeois-authoritarian or ethnically partisan governments. What has happened in some Latin American countries may be repeated in Africa, as well as in some parts of Asia, for instance, the Philippines, and Thailand. In India this has already taken place — in Kerala and West Bengal — and it may happen again. The Marxist inspiration to which I refer is a simplified interpretation of exploitation (based, at times, on the mere evidence of it), together with the Leninist politics of a revolutionary group legitimizing itself by an allegedly scientific theory rather than by popular vote.

Third, such revolutions are no longer likely to occur in the more complex and sophisticated Western societies. Here, certain Marxist philosophical and sociological insights will remain influential (perhaps widely so) — the concept of alienation, the importance of the economic sector, the critique of ideologies; but often these will be used without any allegiance to Marxism proper. Marx's more particular views on economic determinism or class conflict will, I suspect, become less and less attractive because they are too narrowly linked to the very simple social structures of the first industrial age. Most people are fully conscious of the greater complexity of contemporary society. Thus, on the one hand, while there may be reason for concern about the problem of exploitation in modern Western societies, the issue cannot be related simply to the ownership or lack of ownership of the means of production. On the other hand, social classes — regardless of whether or not it is still correct to use this term — tend to diversify in today's society rather than to polarize into two separate contending groups. One cannot really examine any pattern of social stratification without paying attention to the important and often independent influences of ethno-cultural factors.

In short, one hardly dares to analyze society and history today only in terms of categories like the forces of production, social relations, bases/superstructure, etc. All such categories, even though not devoid of interest, lack the precision and definition required for understanding the contemporary situation. Marxist *praxis* has fared better in less advanced societies, but whether or not it has helped these societies is another question altogether, especially when, in addition to Marxist categories of analysis, they have also adopted the controversial and dangerous remedies which Lenin adapted from Marx.

Fourth, what about the future of Marxism in countries dominated by Marxist-Communist parties? Eastern Europe will remain a troubled area, where nationalism will play an ever more important role. Soviet society will not soon be shaken, nor will the grip of Marxism there soon be relaxed. By this I mean the grip of *official* Marxist doctrine as taught in the official party schools or other state-run educational institutions, even if this doctrine is currently met by disbelief or indifference. As a matter of fact, such skepticism is not a new phenomenon in the Soviet Union. Instead, I believe that "covert" changes will slowly be introduced — even changes or modifications in the content of the ideology, but that there will be scrupulous attention paid to preserving the name and label of Marxist Communism as such.

There are already signs that these kinds of change are occurring in the understanding of morals presented in Marxist school textbooks. Good and evil are no longer defined as what exclusively serves or harms the socialist revolution. At times one even finds *explicit* admission that several values impose themselves on all human beings prior to any ideology (or religious creed). At a recent meeting of Marxist philosophers and Christian theologians called by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest, I heard just this admission made not only by Marxists, but even by Soviet ideologists. There are also changes slowly taking place in the sphere of economic organization, particularly in Hungary, where liberalization is occurring without any official renunciation of Marxist allegiance. As the Secretary of the Hungarian Communist party recently observed in an official report, progress is underway in the areas of economic freedom, social freedom, and cultural freedom (although less so in the area of religious freedom!); at the same time *pluralism* is carefully avoided. (Pluralism, it should be remembered, is the Marxist code-word for a multiple party system as opposed to the dominant one-party system.)

As an hypothesis, therefore, one can accept that some degree of post-Marxism is already present in several Communist

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countries, but that it will take a long time for that fact to be officially acknowledged. A more likely course is that effective reinterpretations of Marxist doctrine will take place without the admission that they are reinterpretations. This kind of "creative development" of Marx's thought is, of course, not unfamiliar to Western Marxists. In the end, I believe, Leninism (the monistic organization of state government exclusive of "pluralism") will remain long after much else has changed.

In summary, we are not yet entering a really post-Marxist age because there will remain for a long time a fairly stable Communist regime in a large and powerful country, the Soviet Union, and because a simplified form of Marxism will continue to be an ingredient of new third-world revolutions. But this negative proposition needs to be qualified for two reasons. First, there are clear signs that Marxist concepts have become less acceptable in the intellectual world of Western societies as too poorly defined for the thorough scientific inquiry practiced there and generally inapplicable to the analysis of advanced industrialism; at the same time, the appeal of Marxism has diminished in the political sphere. Second, not only are there early warning signals that Marxist ideology is increasingly wearing out in Communist countries, but even among Marxist ideologists one finds more frequent reference to the idea of commonly shared human values which exist prior to any ideology. In part, this recognition derives from reflection on the new situation confronting mankind because of our possession of nuclear weapons. This admission is not of incidental importance, but is decisive for human reason even if it has not yet borne its full fruit.

(Jean-Yves Calvez, S.J. is Visiting Fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown, director of the Centre de Recherche et d'Action Sociales *in Paris, and author of* La Penseé de Karl Marx *and* The Church and Social Justice.)

SHLOMO AVINERI

Appeal & dissatisfaction

ANYONE trying to answer the question posed to us must respond to Marx's thought both as an attempt to interpret and change the world, as well as to the performance and appeal of regimes which call themselves Marxist in the contemporary world. Our assessment must be both theoretical and historical. I will focus on a number of issues which seem to me responsible for both the immense appeal of Marxist ideas and the deep dissatisfaction encountered among many who were initially drawn to Marx and to Marxism.

1. Marx's vision was a synthesis, a secularized version of the Judeo-Christian quest for salvation and the eighteenth century Enlightenment belief in historical progress and human amelioration. Filtered through the lenses of Hegelian dialectics, this vision tried to identify a concrete historical subject conscious of its own transformative role in the world-historical process. The proletariat was to be the legitimate successor to the "Philosopher King," as well as to Hegel's "world historical individual" that would not only change the world, but also understand the process of change wrought by it.

One hundred years later, the major problem is not epistemological, but historical: has this identification of the proletariat with Reason in History been vindicated? It is a fact that on many occasions, sizable parts of the European working class have shown themselves more amenable to conservative, sometimes reactionary ideas.

2. By postulating man as *homo faber*, Marx correctly identified labor as both the sphere of human bondage, as well as the realm of his emancipatory potential. Historically, Marx claimed, man's mastery over nature (i.e., labor) has always been transformed into man's mastery over his fellow men — class rule. The Marxian vision of a classless society was aimed at separating the two — intensifying man's mastery over nature through a new organization of production so as to free human beings from bondage to each other.

Man the demiurge is thus at the center of Marx's scheme, but not man as an isolated atom or nomad, but man-in-relationship, species being *(Gattungswesen)*. Marx's socialism, implied in his philosophical anthropology, is drawn directly from the Western philosophical tradition.

One hundred years later, our experience tells us that not only mastery over men, but mastery over nature itself has its problems, and that these have not merely material but also philosophical and anthropological dimensions as well. There is also a *Qual der Materie*, though perhaps not in the sense implied by Jakob Boehme, that indicates man's relationship to man cannot be so easily divorced from his relationship to nature. Our heightened cultural awareness of the problems of ecology is not only a challenge to the conventional wisdom of capitalist-industrial thought and practice, but to Marxist social analysis as well. In this, as in other aspects of his thought, Marx turned out to be a true son of the nineteenth century, incorporating both its achievements as well as its limitations.

3. While Marx's message is universal, his historical horizon was basically Western and Eurocentric. In the *Communist Manifesto*, as well as in his numerous articles for the *New York Daily Tribune*, Marx emphasized the civilizing role of capitalist industrial expansion vis-à-vis the non-European world; and his concept of "the Asiatic mode of production" postulates a dual structure of historical development and explication: one for Europe — dynamic, dialectical, and transformative — and one for Asia — static, stagnant, and unchanging. The theoretical and historical problems involved in such a dual scheme are numerous and obvious.

One should not be surprised that in this Marx again showed himself to be a son of his time. Nor should one fail to realize that, on the other hand, a mechanical application to non-European societies of Marx's universal scheme of historical development, basically culled from the European experience, could be fatal and horrifying.

Yet the dilemma is even greater: Marx was one of the major European thinkers who tried to mold our perception of histori-

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cal development into a meaningful structure, and its meaningfulness was a necessary prerequisite for its being open to conscious human direction and control. Yet how can one mold such a structure within any other intellectual and cultural horizon than the one derived from one's own culture, even if one tries to elevate it — as Marx surely did — to a universal level? To overlook one's own cultural experience leads to a barren abstraction; yet the alternative, as pursued by Marx, may break down before the complex variety of historical experience in different cultures. Marx's Eurocentrism is thus an example of the immanent dilemmas of any sort of an historical Grand Design.

4. Marx postulated an ever-growing universalization of human relations, and the disappearance of regional and national differences. This, according to Marx, was already evident in capitalist society, and would become intensified under socialism. Nationalism would become a thing of the past. Nowhere in his writings is there a premonition that first in Europe, and then in the non-European world, nationalism would become the wave of the future. Again, the legacy of the Enlightenment, as well as of Hegel, is clearly visible.

One hundred years later, it is obvious that the forces — political as well as cultural — of nationalism have been not only grossly overlooked and underestimated by the Marxian tradition, but that national solidarity has, in many cases, proven itself stronger and more enduring than class solidarity. Overlooking this nationalist dimension has greatly weakened the socialist movement in its historical confrontation with other ideologies, which were able to preempt the appeal to national consciousness.

5. From *laissez-faire* economic theory, Marx derived his minimalist concept of the role of the state in economic affairs under capitalism. Such a minimalist state obviously could not be expected to intervene and prevent the eventual collapse of capitalism.

One hundred years later, the combination of the political structures of the nation-state with the defensive mechanisms of Keynesian economics has presented Marxian socialism with a very different neocapitalist state, one highly interventionist in political structure, controlling large sections of the economy, softening, through legislation and welfare policies, some of the harshness of capitalism for many of the weaker strata of society. Such a state can hardly be expected to wither away under the impact of socialist transformations. It may even be perfected and further developed.

6. In the Eastern European countries, Marx — and especially the early Marx — has been repeatedly used as a critical tool to measure existing Communist regimes, and to find them wanting: in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and of course Yugoslavia. For a Marxist, it is an unusually cruel twist of events to see the 1844 *Paris Manuscripts* quoted as a critique of Eastern European Communism. But it shows that the *critical* nature of Marx's theory has not been entirely lost.

7. Looking at the map of the world today, it must come as an ironic shock to realize that none of the Western, industrialized countries, to which Marx directed his attention — England, Germany, France, the United States — has experienced a socialist transformation, whereas Marxist ideologies rule supreme in countries like Russia, and China, Vietnam and North Korea, to which they certainly were not initially addressed. An ironic observer might point out that this has happened before: Christianity, after all, grew out of the prophetic traditions of Judaism, and the initial message of Jesus was aimed at his Jewish coreligionists. Christianity turned less than successful among the Jews and became triumphantly successful among the Gentiles, even managing to conquer the Roman Empire. It may be that something similar is happening to the teachings of Marx.

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NORMAN BIRNBAUM

Marx after Marxism

IS IT ACCURATE to term our epoch post-Marxist? Two decades ago, the critical Left everywhere would have answered "no." It was recognized that while class conflict in capitalist societies had not culminated in revolution, and while the global system of capitalist exploitation seemed more pervasive, the development of the welfare state in the West owed much to Marxism. Social, political, and even religious movements claiming direct descent from Marxism were widely distributed. And today, while state socialist societies hardly represent utopia (socialist appropriation of the means of production by party and state has entailed new forms of exploitation), the multiple forms of alienation and an intensified consciousness of homelessness in capitalist societies suggest that the deformation of the human spirit may be as acute now as it was at the beginning of the capitalist epoch. Marxism, of course, needs to be modernized, adapted to any number of phenomena not envisioned by its founders. But two decades ago, this task was felt to be well under way. It would have been impossible then to declare that Marxism could neither ap-

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prehend nor reshape our world. The situation has now changed.

Visiting the East German peace movement a few months ago, I was struck by how very different is its consciousness. A generation ago, its predecessors in opposition were linked to humanist Marxists, the anti-Stalinists of Hungary and Poland in 1956. Much of the present-day East European opposition is distant even from the Czech reformers of 1968. It seeks to destroy bureaucratic power, develop pluralistic culture, and preserve the earth and its species. Its affinities are with movements like the German Greens. Elsewhere, Friar Leonardo Boff refuses to consider himself a Marxist, saying Marxism is but one among many methods of analysis. He seeks a church prepared to revise its Eurocentrism. In any number of new social movements, the theme of cultural autonomy is as pronounced as the theory of class conflict defined in strictly economic terms. The pathologies of both state socialism and international capitalism have enlarged and fragmented the structure of social conflict.

In short, while the world economy has assumed dimensions anticipated by Marx, the new ideology and sensibility -- and even contemporary culture as a whole — escape his categories. Modern social conflicts result from differences in gender groups, generations, nations and regions, as well as from economic classes. Aesthetic and moral values fuse with, and not infrequently define, class interests. It is my sense, then, that we have entered a post-Marxist epoch. If we are to discern its outlines, it is important to understand what has occurred.

Marx began as a poet, proceeding through philosphy to political economy. He adumbrated "the laws of motion of capitalism," and wished to dedicate *Capital* to Darwin. His own life exemplified the trajectory of the nineteenth century — from post-Christian millennialism to post-religious scientism. His work includes both scientific description and moral prophecy, combining elements that are analytical and eschatological, empirical and religious. The lines dividing these categories were never rigid; Marx's original labors of scientific description were charged with spiritual energy. The existing world was scrutinized for the sake of a higher (and better) world to come.

But Marxism has now been academicized, has thoroughly penetrated much of what was once called "bourgeois social science," and is taught by bourgeois professors who are not Marxists. It has been assimilated into the Western intellectual tradition — a tradition of which Marx was more a part than most of his philistine detractors. Its spiritual impulses have found other outlets: movements of psychological and religious renewal, newly conceived systems of spiritual transformation. Even within Marxism itself, it is proclaimed that the future is now, that indefinite postponement of revolutionary delight denies one of Marx's central tenets. Such claims revert to a more primitive, more poetic Marxism in which the complex structure erected by Marx himself dissolves like the insubstantial world of Prospero's farewell to art in *The Tempest*.

To be sure, a world economic system has emerged (comprising both capitalist and the self-designated socialist states) which fulfills some of Marx's major predictions. Capital knows no national loyalty; its relentless pursuit of profit across frontiers is the only effective internationalism in sight. Our politics has not kept pace with this transformation; its language is unable either to describe how impersonal concentrations of economic power dictate the fate of nations, or to effectively interpret the enormous development of science and technology. New proletariats multiply as more workers perform utterly routine jobs or become superfluous. Welfare capitalism, dependent upon production for a mass consumer market, has engendered needs which it cannot satisfy. None of these developments would surprise Marx.

At the same time, however, revolutionary — even mass reformist — movements in the West are conspicuously absent. A global proletariat may be more combative, but organized international capital has succeeded (often unintentionally) in dividing and exploiting it, just as it has divided Western populations. Put differently, the internal divisions of Western capitalism, as well as the visible incompetence of capitalist elites, are balanced by the incoherence and disunity of the global opposition. The gradual socialization of the means of production has occurred, but its triumphant historical subject is capital itself.

Nor has state socialism processed that differently. Ironically, it is even more vulnerable to a Marxist critique than capitalist regimes. Production is politically centralized, coercion economically organized, consciousness and culture instrumentalized. Even the ostensible masters of the apparatus are servants to it. (This is also true of bureaucratic capitalism.) For Marx, it was precisely the crassness and visibility of this domination and exploitation which would contribute to the collapse of capitalism. Capitalism hardly thrives. But compare it with "police socialism" where parties who call themselves Marxist administer a spiritual vacuum, furtively penetrated by an opposition which is in principle judged to be impossible by the system's apologists. The new society is the old society writ large.

WHILE THE record of state socialism is a factor in today's retreat from Marxism, I suspect it contributes less to the genesis of a post-Marxist epoch than to a revival of pre-Marxist consciousness — a resignation to the eternal return of oppression. The crimes and tyrannies of our century have liquidated the belief in progress. As a result, the secular version of transcendence embodied in original Marxism has ceded, especially among the opponents of capitalism, to miniaturized notions of felicity. Alternative movements like the Greens explicitly demand reconsideration or redefinition of the idea of progress. Burckhardt and Nietzsche have triumphed over their contemporaries.

More important to the emergence of a post-Marxist consciousness has been the intractability of capitalist culture: Marxists' political predictions break upon the rock of its immutable autonomy. In capitalist society, consciousness is fabricated industrially in ways which are strikingly similar to its

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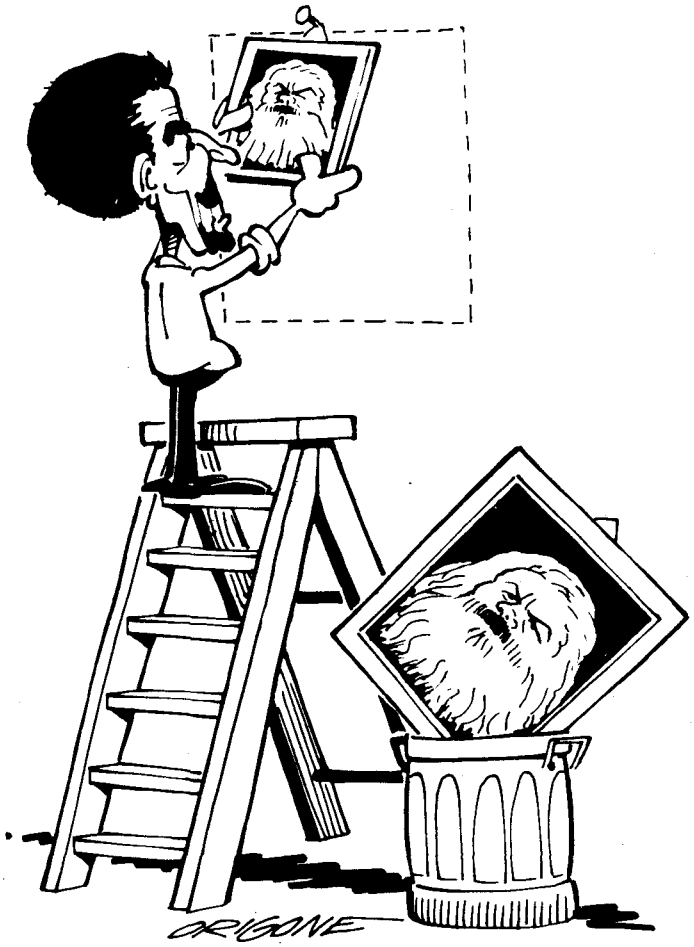

manipulation by state socialism. I am not referring here to a modern version of "bread and circuses." Rather, the centralization of capitalist societies generates multiple and often mutually antagonistic nodes of differentiation and resistance. But the welfare state neutralizes explosive economic antagonism by proliferating a wide variety of aesthetic, ethnic, and religious values. Economic centralization and cultural fragmentation thus supplement one another. We dare not overlook the possibility that mass unemployment and brutal, rapid declines in living standards may yet engender large-scale class conflict in some capitalist societies. But for the moment, these societies use adversity very differently. New corporativisms and older identities (rooted in family, religion, ethnicity, language, etc.) alternate. Multiple allegiances and split social roles (e.g., those fostered by the separation of work and residence) preclude the kind of class consciousness Marx expected. No matter how inauthentic or instrumentalized, the culture of capitalism perpetuates itself. Analogous developments are evident across the world: movements like the Islamic revival, the Catholic renaissance in Latin America, political Buddhism in Asia, doctrines like Negritude — all are the new foci of social consciousness

None of this should astonish us. The history of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe will surely sustain a reading quite different from the standard Marxist interpretation. Even the concept of "totality," advanced by modern Marxists as essential to understanding Marx's thought, may lead, as Lukacs felt, to a critical revision of Marxism. And consider the challenge of psychoanalysis to the Marxist theory of human nature. Despite Marx's complex depiction of human interests, the depth of Freud's vision is missing. Marx ignored the relative autonomy of the development of character in a given historical milieu; the thinker who thought in epochs came to believe that humanity could leap over its own historical shadow. One day, perhaps, humanity will actualize its communal or higher self in a revolutionary furor. In the meantime, authoritarianism and aggression threaten to prolong our wait.

The most recent challenge to Marxism comes from the school of historians closest to it: the *Annales* group in France. Insisting on the primacy of "the long term," they depict structures like the family, community, and habitat as inextricably linked to class configurations. And newer historical examinations of the relationship between politics and the state reveal how much of what we earlier identified as economic factors are indeed political — leaving us quite unclear about which is primary. These ideas, along with psychoanalysis and other psychologies, give us fresh insight into the notion of historical totality. They destroy the linear clarity of Marx's theory of an economic base with a cultural and social superstructure.

In his vision of a unified science of man and nature, Marx was a typical nineteenth-century figure. But recent transformations in the history and philosophy of science have led us to question the Marxist and positivist reliance on a single canonical scientific method. Marx himself never doubted that humanity's highest task was the mastery of nature, but his own critique of technocratic rationality has prompted us to question our previous trust in instrumental reason. When this distrust is joined to a renewed interest in ending giganticism in social structures and to the ecologists' demand for a less arrogant approach to nature, we come to see Marx as a prisoner of the assumptions of early capitalist industrialization. We return, in a sense, to the roots of Marxism itself. Marx sought the transcendence of capitalism so that humanity could be restored to wholeness.

Marx expected to find a key to this wholeness of art, especially in the epic and tragic poetry of the Greeks. He was enormously impressed by the fact that, despite their dependence on "immature social conditions," the works of Homer and the tragedians "still constitute for us a source of aesthetic enjoyment and in certain respects prevail as the standard and model beyond attainment."

A return to human wholeness, a search for irreducible virtue in human nature, a willingness to be instructed by the past (even our own past as children) will certainly give us a view of transcendence very different from the progressive hopes of the age. By renouncing Marx, we may return to his spiritual intentions. The post-Marxist epoch, then, will be marked indelibly by Marx himself.

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THE END OF CATHOLICISM, PART III

The provisional path to mystery

ANDREW M. GREELEY

PROFESSOR Sheehan is a smooth and clever debater. Backed into the corner by David Tracy's charge that he has not accurately read the "liberal" consensus and by my comment that both social science and the philosophy of science create a vast middle ground between fundamentalism and agnosticism, he changes the subject, begs the question, and engages in name calling.

The subject, as far as I'm concerned is whether his postulation of the rigid alternatives of fundamentalism or agnosticism, is a fair statement of the present situation. I deny that either the philosophers of cognition or the social scientists of cognition accept his position. He does not reply to this but asserts once again as proven that which remains to be proven — namely that we must choose between scientific rationalism (perhaps as pious agnostics) and blind fundamentalism.

The issue is not whether I am afraid of losing something valuable or whether I write "little tracts" or whether I am guilty of charming simplicities, or whether I'm a pious agnostic, a rotarian optimist, a Hegelian, a modernist and a Unitarian, (all this constitutes cheap, patronizing smoke screen; it is frantic and intellectually dishonest name calling). The issue remains whether Sheehan understands the work done in the philosophy of knowing (by Ricoeur and Polanyi, for example) and in the social science of knowing (by Chomsky and Geertz, for example). There is nothing in his reply which leads me to correct my first impression that he is serenely innocent of understanding these fields.

1) Professor Sheehan may belittle my competence in the social science of cognition if he wishes. Nonetheless my brief summary is an accurate description of the state of the question among social scientists who are interested in the subject. Indeed the major axis of debate is not whether we know by model fitting but whether some of our models are innate (Chomsky argues that not only the deep structures of grammar which he has studied are innate but so too perhaps are other models for knowing). To ridicule the model fitting paradigm is merely to display monumental ignorance of what is being done by serious scholars in a field that is pertinent for his argument.

2) To fail to see in Ricoeur's second naïveté and Polanyi's tacit knowing a devastating assault on his scientific rationalism is to understand nothing at all about the work of these men and nothing at all about the philosophical and theological discussions occasioned by their work. Not only is Professor Sheehan serenely innocent of the state of the question in my discipline, he seems also blithely unaware of the state of the question in his own discipline.

3) The "rotarian optimism" jab at William James (through me) is acutely embarrassing. It is a nice turn of phrase perhaps, based doubtless on a textbook summary of James's pragmatism that Professor Sheehan read somewhere, but in scoring a rhetorical point, Sheehan makes himself look pathetic, once again demonstrating an insouciant innocence, this time about James and about the current rediscovery of James.

Let me attempt to summarize briefly and in my own words James's criteria of truth which he established long before Professor Sheehan's oversimplifications were written. Let me add the assertion that while the religionist cannot constrain the scientist to accept his data, neither can the scientist claim that his data are the only way of knowing. In so doing I will also describe in a sketchy outline how a whole literature on human knowing approaches the problem, not perhaps explicitly under James's aegis, but nonetheless in the same broad perspective. Need I say to Professor Sheehan that James was not a believer?

(I justify this excursus on the grounds that James's criteria are to be found in *The Varieties*, his social science book par excellence, and not in his philosophical works. Anyone wishing to read a definitive refutation of Professor Sheehan's flummery should consult the last part of *The Varieties).*

According to James there are three criteria for acceptance of a truth — luminosity, congruence, and fruitfulness. The mind, he says, accepts as provisionally true an insight which illumines the phenomena around it, that fits with the other things the person knows to be true, and proves an effective guide when followed through the confusing morass of mysteries which impinge on consciousness.

These criteria apply to all forms of knowing, but are adjusted for the different kinds of phenomena which the person may be investigating. Whether one is determining another's appropriateness as a lover, discovering the double helix (as did Watson and Crick), postulating the Johanine community (pace

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Raymond Brown), describing "Lady Wisdom" (ala Roland Murphy), or seeing Mary as the sacrament of the womanliness of God, one uses these criteria (according to Polanyi often "tacitly" and long before the scientific experimentation which "proves" the insight). In all such tentative acceptance of truth there is a leap of faith because the nature of the reality is such that consent is never forced, not even in science. (Such leaps of faith cover the landscape of the history of science from ether to Einstein's resolute refusal to admit the possibility of a unified field theory and current scholars' equally resolute determination to find one). In the midst of rationalism there is faith; in the midst of faith there is the skepticism which demands continued testing and retesting of the models of faith — continued pilgrimages, in Ricoeur's terms, from the first to the second naïveté. The so-called scientific method (the scientific rationalism of which Professor Sheehan is so proud) is merely part of the application of the third criterion: Does the model lead to successful experiments which are designed to test it as a road map of reality? As Polanyi observes in a passage which Professor Sheehan apparently forgot, the role of the experiment is to prove what the scientist already knows is true. (Einstein knew the theory of relativity was true before any experiment sustained it).

This model fitting is anything but an optimistic exercise, despite Professor Sheehan. It is cautious, tentative, open ended, flexible, suspicious, ready to change and refine, pragmatic (you should excuse the expression), skeptical. Perhaps someone will find a better model than the double helix. Perhaps the woman is not the one I think she is. Perhaps the Johanine community was more integrated into the rest of the Jesus movement than I realized, perhaps Lady Wisdom also reflects a folk religion consort of Yahweh, perhaps the Resurrection stories have more historical basis than I thought (To question the detailed historical accuracy of the Resurrection stories, by the way, is not to deny the historicity of the Resurrection, a distinction which seems to escape Professor Sheehan), perhaps there is not enough liberating passion in my Mary Myth. Are they all "true"? Yes of course, but provisionally and tentatively true, subject to revision and modification as I (whoever the I may be) continue in my relentless enterprise of model fitting.

The point in all of this is that at the most general level, science and religion are similar methods of probing and groping through the dark in search of more luminous, congruent, and fruitful ways of understanding mystery and charting a path through it. Both work through symbols, both use stories to describe what is experienced in the dark — whether they be stories of Mary or the risen Jesus or of quarks and quasars and quanta and "weak forces" and "strong forces."

Has Professor Sheehan ever seen a quark? Or a "weak force"? Or a quantum? Has anyone ever seen them? Are they not extremely useful models (for the present at any rate) for organizing and charting a course through baffling mystery? Can Sheehan not comprehend that they are "not bad" stories in a similar sense as are the Resurrection stories or "nice myths" like my Mary Myth? Is he unaware of the literature which argues that *all* human knowing requires myths, symbols, and stories? Both religion and science cautiously and pragmatically fit models (in a way not unlike a detective in a mystery story which is probably one of the reasons mystery stories are so popular). Both labor tentatively and cautiously; both make leaps of faith; both are plagued with doubts and uncertainties *because faith and doubt are not merely attributes of religious knowing but of all human knowing*.

The quantum theory is a "story" too, an intriguing, complex, fascinating story which organizes the data and provides the explorer of mystery with guidance and direction. It is a luminous, congruent, and fruitful story, a useful story, a "good" story, in Professor Sheehan's words. Is it a "true" story? Does it live up to Professor Sheehan's agnostic demands for clear, rational, undebatable proof? Of course not. The theoretical physicist would not understand why it had to. Is it not enough that the quantum theory be good and useful and hence provisionally true? Why does it have to be any more? The quantum "myth" in the mystery of science is analogous to the Resurrection story and the Mary "myth" in matters of ultimate mystery: both provide charts, requiring major leaps of faith, through the dark and dazzling mysteries "out there."

THE UN-PIOUS agnostic like Professor Sheehan and the fundamentalist (perhaps waving the hammer of the "Magisterium") want more than provisional truth.

More is not given in the human condition.

Professor Sheehan seems to be embarrassed by the possibility that he will be caught in the pious naïveté of faith. He does not comprehend how much faith of one sort or another is required in every act of knowing, including an act seemingly of the purest science, and how much faith he must engage in every day if he is to get out of bed and walk down the street.

I think the above is a fair, if simple and overly popular, summary of how the Jamesian criteria or Jamesian-like criteria are applied by a considerable number of social scientists, philosophers of science, and physical and biological scientists (not necessarily in every case referring to James). It is not merely the way I know, as Professor Sheehan contends, it is the way these scholars say they and indeed everyone knows. Professor Sheehan may dismiss this approach with patronizing ridicule if he wishes, but in so doing he merely displays his own sad and rather shabby ignorance.

One finally despairs of dialoguing with Professor Sheehan's

THIS ARTICLE by Andrew M. Greeley and the one following by David Tracy are concluding responses to Thomas Sheehan's pieces, "On Satan & Catholic Liberals" and "Greeley's Agnosticism," which appeared in the September 21 *Commonweal*. Sheehan, in turn, was replying to earlier commentaries by Tracy and Greeley (*Commonweal*, Aug. 10) on a review-essay Sheehan had published in the June 14 *New York Review of Books*. For the time being, the editors must call this discussion to a close. See editorial, p. 518.

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slippery rhetoric, his glib, shallow agnostic arguments, and his contemptuous, "with it" innuendoes. Like Oakland, there is ultimately no there there. He does not understand the liberal consensus in theology. He does not understand the social science of knowing, he does not understand the philosophers of science such as Polanyi and Ricoeur, he does not understand how those who work on the leading edge of both disciplines now realize that all forms of knowing, science and religion equally included, struggle to understand reality through a model fitting process which requires both faith and skepticism.

I challenge those who wish to embrace Professor Sheehan's position — on the grounds perhaps that it is "purer" as one correspondent suggests — to explore the fields I have cited and decide for themselves whether his statement of alternatives is accurate or adequate. Start with *The Varieties*.

Finally — one must say it candidly — for all the stir the article in the *New York Review of Books* created and for all Professor Sheehan's unquestioned forensic skills, his ignorance of the disciplines around which he flits, strongly suggests that he does not know what he is talking about.

THE END OF CATHOLICISM, PART III

To trust or suspect

DAVID TRACY

"My, my. A body does get around. Here we ain't been coming from Alabama but two months, and now it's already Tennessee."

—Lena, as quoted in William Faulkner's *Light in August*

ONE WAY to respond to criticism is to change the subject. With considerable Irish charm, Thomas Sheehan does exactly that in his response to my criticisms of his article in *The New York Review of Books*. The questions he now raises are more important and more interesting than the ones posed in his original article. But it is worth noting that they are different.

What his original article claimed, and what I responded to, is this: there is a liberal consensus in modern Catholic exegesis and theology, and that consensus has brought Catholic theology to the "limits" of its own language. Catholic theology is now at the point "where one can ask what its teachings have to offer that cannot be found outside the scope of its own experience and discourse."

I disputed that claim. In his response, Sheehan is now strangely silent on the "liberal consensus" he earlier forged. He is not interested, it seems, in arguments that there are "levels" of discourse which function in the "liberal consensus" he chose to interpret. In fact, Thomas Sheehan seems uninterested now in discussing what theologians actually do when they do theology. His interest lies elsewhere.

That interest, as his recent reply makes clear, is in the question of whether theology itself — all theology (especially the "modern," "liberal" kind) — is not unconsciously self-deluding. Modern Catholic theologians, we both agree, employ a hermeneutic of retrieval informed principally by an attitude of fundamental trust in the tradition. What they need instead, Sheehan claims, is a hermeneutic of radical suspicion upon that tradition. But such suspicion, he insists, theologians do not, and, perhaps temperamentally, cannot allow. They may "tinker," but they are not truly suspicious. Hence their unconscious self-delusion.

This is an entirely legitimate question to theology. Sheehan is not the first to suggest that any theology as theology is ideological. Nor am I the first theologian to try to reflect on that charge. There is, I agree, a difference between a hermeneutic informed by basic trust in a tradition, and one informed by basic suspicion. So the first question for both of us to consider is: how can we converse critically about these differences across such a fundamental chasm separating our attitudes?

Criticism is geared to pursuing the truth by examining rival claims and eliminating all possible conscious errors. If Sheehan thinks I erred in my interpretations of his position, or in my arguments with his position, he should have argued back and shown where my errors lie. He has not. He has elected, instead, to unmask what he feels is a radical ideology unconsciously pervading all modern theology. Theology is not so much wrong or erroneous as self-deluding, illusory, systemically and unconsciously distorted. That's why "liberals" can only be "brilliant conservatives." That's why, despite all their use of critical methods, theologians can only be reformers, "tinkerers" polishing the brass on the Titanic as it heads for

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the inevitable crash against a presently submerged (unconscious?) iceberg.

It is important to be clear about this: if Thomas Sheehan was really, all along, articulating a radical suspicion of *any* theological argument, why did he not say so in his original article? He could then have spared himself, and the rest of us, further excursions into all those other issues he raised. Those issues, it turns out, were never the point. The real task, he now urges us, is to reflect on whether his radical suspicions of any liberal theological enterprise are persuasive. As he states them so far, they are not.

Does Thomas Sheehan believe that trust in any tradition precludes critical and even suspicious attitudes towards that same tradition? Is such trust a kind of pure, Billy Budd attitude that can never be critical, and is incapable of suspicion on itself? Who is he reading? What is he experiencing in any personal situation of trust he has ever been a party to? Consider this exchange itself: our fundamental trust of one another's intellectual integrity and personal honesty has not been broken by our strong criticisms of one another's arguments, or even by whatever mutual suspicions of one another's intellectual position we may express. That is precisely what every conversation, every argument with someone you fundamentally trust demands. It is also what every conversation with any tradition you fundamentally trust demands.

The contemporary theologians Sheehan cites (Küng, Schillebeeckx, Rahner, myself—and by implication the political and liberation theologians) have tried to reflect publicly on the critical results of historical methods for traditional beliefs. They have also tried to reflect critically on the radical suspicions of any theological consciousness developed by such masters of suspicion as Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche. Why then does Sheehan not present these theologians' arguments, along with the arguments of radical suspicion, and show us why their theological responses do not or even cannot work? Why? I may be allowed some suspicion myself, because Thomas Sheehan may trust too much in familiar modern methods of suspicion himself.

To trust in a global suspicion is no more and no less vulnerable to the need for critical assessment than to trust in a fundamental trust. Critical reflection, if critical, does not hand blank cheques over to anyone—neither to Sheehan's mythical "Simon," nor to Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, or Heidegger. Any fundamental attitude (whether trust or suspicion) is *always* vulnerable to criticism and suspicion from any source.

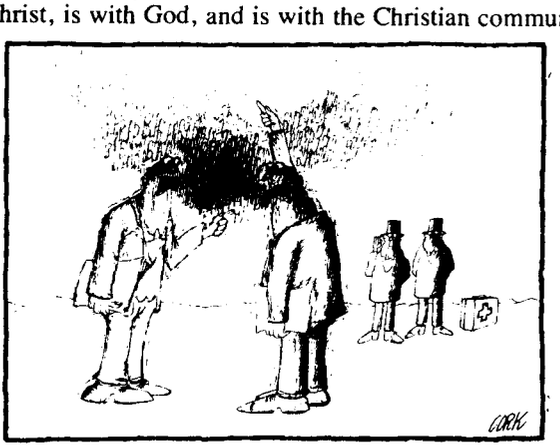
Christianity is not, I repeat, religiously grounded in historico-critical reconstructions. And yet Christianity, as a religion grounded in historical events, is vulnerable to historical criticism. If Jesus of Nazareth never existed, or if he was an Elmer Gantry-like fraud, this would radically affect Christian self-understanding. Both these claims have been expressed by historians, and both have been found implausible on strictly historico-critical grounds. I stated in my response, and restate here, that "Historical Jesus" research and research into the "original apostolic message" have a critical function for Christian self-understanding, even though they cannot, in the nature of the case, have a constitutive function. Sheehan seems to agree with this distinction between critical and constitutive functions, only to quietly shift the meaning of "constitutive" to his description of the "content" of revelation as seance-like discoveries of spooky supernatural information. But that is a position which no one—I repeat no one—of the theologians he cited holds.

Christian theology is accountable to any legitimate suspicions, however radical. Feminist Christian theologies, as one major example, have recently demonstrated by argued and persuasive suspicion an endemic, unconscious sexism in traditional Christian self-understanding. What counts is a critical attitude, from whatever approach which is willing to put itself at risk in every conversation and every argument.

If we agree on that, then Thomas Sheehan has as much explaining to do as the theologians he suspects. And that explaining cannot be met through rhetorical flourishes about "quasi-parliamentary" procedures, "what if" scenarios about Jesus' return, Sheehan's memories of Catholic grammar school, or suggestions that theologians must know, like the "rest of us," that Jesus is "dead as a doornail."

Thomas Sheehan's arguments too often take the form of offering inadequate alternatives: either you believe that Jesus is dead, and that's that; or you believe that Cecil B. de Mille's rendition of the resurrection of Jesus is the best interpretation we have. Sheehan assures us that something happened to Jesus' "reputation" after his death, but that the rest is "faith,"—Sheehan's shorthand for "Simon's hoping Jesus out of the grave."

The theologians Sheehan cites (Küng, Schillebeeckx, Rahner, and myself) do believe in the resurrection of Jesus. They do not believe that this reality is reducible to the historical claim that something happened to Jesus' *reputation* after he was crucified. They believe in the resurrection of Jesus on the basis of some personal religious experience of Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen one. They believe that God did vindicate the startling message and the shocking, radical mode of life proclaimed and lived by Jesus of Nazareth. They believe *in* this Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Jesus is not dead as a doornail. And they also believe *in* this Jesus Christ *with* "the Apostles," as Paul believed: Jesus' life and message have been vindicated by God. That vindication means that Jesus is the Christ, is with God, and is with the Christian community



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now. They experience this reality in prayer, in worship, in word and sacrament, in reflecting on the New Testament narrations of that life, death and resurrection, and in every genuine attempt to live the kind of challenge disclosed in the New Testament documents of this Jesus of Nazareth.

Theologians have also argued why this central belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is, by the very nature of the subject matter, a belief necessarily grounded in a contemporary religious discernment of discipleship and prayer. If Sheehan believes that such religious experience is impossible, or that any process of religious discernment is implausible, then let us discuss that. If he believes that any talk of the resurrection of Jesus is either false consciousness, contrary to what we all know is possible, or that present theological interpretations of the Resurrection are a falsification of the New Testament statements, then let us discuss that.

But if, as is more likely, all these are not the real questions he wishes to pose at all, then what are? On the basis of his response to me, Thomas Sheehan's question seems to be this: is it really possible for any twentieth-century intelligent person to believe such central claims of Christianity as Jesus' resurrection? He suspects that *any* attempt to interpret such beliefs as true is finally an unconscious expression of "false consciousness," including the subtle interpretations of liberal theological "tinkerers."

But even these questions suggested by Sheehan are caught in the paradoxes of his language. We are informed that the problem with theologians, docile creatures that they are, is that they may not be able to imagine anything really different from what the tradition tells them. On the other hand, we are instructed that they are stubborn creatures who will not agree with what everyone already knows: "once you're dead you're dead."

To be a Christian (or better, with Kierkegaard, to attempt to become a Christian) *is* to risk a life on something radically different. How different can be glimpsed by anyone's reflection on the demands for what a truly human life might be in light of the ministry, message, actions, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It can be glimpsed in people's attempt at Christian prayer, reflection, and action, like the prayer, reflection, and action of those "basic communities" of Christians in Latin America. It can even be glimpsed in the sometimes gray-on-gray arguments of liberal theologians who attempt to give reasons for the hope and trust they *experience*—no more, no less.

On the basis of his arguments against that hope, Thomas Sheehan seems to be a reform-minded modern thinker with a strong religious sense. I respect that option. But the "post-liberal" devil he proposes seems, perhaps unconsciously, to propose an all-too-familiar modern liberal scenario: religion would be acceptable if only it did not make claims other than those we already know.

I do not claim that the present conversation is resolved. But perhaps the questions have become a little clearer. I trust critical conversation and argument. So does Thomas Sheehan. For both of us, I hope, the conversation has just begun.

Screen

NOT-SO-FINAL BATTLES

'CAL' & 'THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY'

"THEY'RE PLAYING our song," the title character of *Cal* says mournfully over the sound of a siren to the woman he loves. It's only a snippet, but characteristic of the sad wit and economy that underlines the movie, the most touching film version of the troubles in Northern Ireland to date. Cal's problem is simple but symbolic: he's in love with the widow of an Ulster policeman whose assassination he abetted by driving a getaway car for an IRA gunman. The woman doesn't know: drawn to her by an uncertain mixture of love and guilt, Cal is trying to forget and forge some kind of healing reconciliation. Personally embodying the contradictions of terrorist civil war in this acute form, Cal is both reluctant accomplice to murder and would-be redeemer. Like his country, he's tied in knots.

Politics might determine one's reaction to *Cal*. An enthusiastic supporter of the IRA provisionals, or at least British withdrawal, would be sure to find much to criticize in its resolutely even-handed approach. The oppression of Catholics is to be sure, vividly depicted. Cal himself is beaten for no apparent reason by Protestant thugs, unaware of his IRA connections. Later, the house he shares with his father in a predominantly Protestant development is firebombed by Ulster arsonists. The local IRA leader evokes a sympathetic response when recalling the Londonderry "riot" of 1972, when British soldiers killed thirteen Catholics at what, until then, had been a predominantly peaceful demonstration. "We live here, and they're trespassers," he comments succinctly, with much heat and some accuracy. But he leaves out the Ulstermen, as the IRA has always done. He is, moreover, Stalinist in his tactics, employing sadistic killers who pressure Cal into operations despite his desire to bid farewell to arms. A Protestant sympathetically tells Cal after his house is burned, "There are bad bastards on both sides." The film, adapted to the screen by the writer of the original novel, Bernard MacLaverty, seems to condone this sad view and provide no easy answers.

The worst violence in *Cal* occurs at the beginning, even before the initial credits, providing both powerful forward momentum and profound unity to the film. The Ulster policeman whose wife Cal befriends answers his bell during Christmastime revels: happy and flushed from wine and song, he opens his door, is shot, then dies crying out his wife Marcella's name. Elements of this scene are repeated in part or in full as Cal draws near the widow. He first meets her accidentally when he hears her consoled by name in a library; he then tries to draw close, and eventually lands a job at the farm of her

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in-laws, the very spot where the initial murder was committed. Each time he peacefully drives up the road to the house he relives the process of delivering the killer—less an instance of the criminal revisiting the scene of the crime than a symbol of how Northern Ireland's consciousness seems riveted around some ancient, irredeemable wrong for which vengeance and vendetta can have no end. Rarely has so Gothic a plot device served such politically symbolic purposes.

Cal, however, is, at times, under-acted, under-written, and under-directed. Helen Mirren, an experienced British actress, received a Cannes award as Marcella, but is here mostly supportive of Jon Lynch, a young London actor raised in Northern Ireland. His performance is thoroughly understated: we have often to guess his emotions from his drawn, almost wounded face. We don't know exactly what he feels for Marcella, what mixture of love or guilt, what morbidity perhaps, what desire to heal where he once hurt. Moreover, we don't know what motivated him to be a part of the original IRA hit squad; although we see his disgust with the violence he helped perpetrate and his desire to leave the organization, we can only imagine that, initially, he had no sense of the gravity of the acts in which he was engaged. MacLaverty's otherwise excellent screenplay should not have left these gaps. *Cal* is the first feature for Irish documentary-maker Pat O'Connor, but he needs to push to get more from his associates and material, and not assume, despite its eloquence, that it speaks for itself. Even the plot has too many loose ends; without explanation, the neat closure is implausible, to say the least.

Despite these defects, *Cal* is easily one of the best movies this year. From *The Informer*, to *Odd Man Out*, to *Shake Hands with the Devil*, the "troubles" in Ireland have afforded sad raw material for powerful moviemaking on the complicated conflicts of loyalty that the IRA provokes. *Cal* is not as tragic as the first of these two predecessors, nor as fast-paced as the last. In its stark counterpointing of love and war, it may be the most moving.

THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY is a genial mock heroic that, for the most part, successfully mixes ironic fable and jungle adventure-romance. The movie, filmed in Botswana and produced in South Africa, first focuses on a group of bushmen in the Kalahari desert and details their quiet, hunter-gatherer lifestyle. The pilot of a small plane passing overhead casually tosses out a Coke bottle, which, welcome at first as a useful tool to make music or mash fruit, becomes the first object of contention in the group's existence: unlike anything else in the Kalahari world, there is only *one* bottle of Coke, and surprising themselves, the bushmen battle for its possession. It is solemnly renamed "the evil thing," and the bushman leader decides to go to "the edge of the world" to deposit the bottle and hope for no return.

A dry, laconic voice-over narration accompanies the story, at first suggesting mild amusement with primitive innocence, then gradually implying stronger satire on the ways of civilization. To deepen the movie this way requires involving the bushman, however, with two rather clichéd subplots: a romance between a white biologist and a blonde schoolteacher on her first excursion into the wild; and some terrorist activities by black revolutionaries who, having failed in all their own non-exploits, kidnap the schoolteacher and her class. Fortunately, both for the hostage and the film, the bushman's superb tracking talents and his use of the biologist's sedatives comically and nonviolently save the day. The climax of the movie thus makes for a gentle, whimsical send-up of traditional cinematic bloody rescues and "final battles" (see, for example, the unintentionally hilarious version of such an apocalypse in the recently released *Sheena*).

There are some technical problems with the film: the narration recounting the thoughts and activities of the bushman has appropriately been put into English for release here, but this means that the white actors, speaking Afrikaans in the original, must be awkwardly dubbed (you could hardly have subtitles given the previous English voice-over). Moreover, the film relies too heavily on slapstick in its middle, with too many jokes on male klutziness with damsels in distress and too frequent resort to speeded-up "keystone cops" style jungle chase sequences.

More seriously, there have been charges (and picketing) claiming that *The Gods Must Be Crazy* is racist. True, it was produced in South Africa; true, it reflects that nation's power structure, with white hunters, teachers and biologists and black tribesmen, hunters, and, at best, mechanics. But the humor is pretty much at everyone's expense, and the bushman,

Leo Luke Marcello

Times Your Aunt Mary Needs You

You're feasting on crawfish jambalaya
at a beautiful woman's house across town
when your Aunt Mary calls for help.
A truck has driven into
her dining-room wall.

Another time she calls
because her oven-timer
won't turn off. The bell
nearly drives you both crazy
until the electrician arrives
to kill it, grinning.

Later in another city you wait
stranded in her new living room
while someone reattaches your rearview.
She's so relieved you're here because
today suddenly after all these years
her oven won't turn off.

Not the bell, but those coils,
getting hotter and hotter,
hotter than you ever expected
to cook in your old ages.

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who brings sweetness and light wherever he goes, comes off best of all. The film isn't racist, but primitivist; its hero played by a Kalahari native (credited phonetically as "N!xaw") is a stone age Charlie Chaplin, whose benign wisdom subtly underlines the craziness of the technologically superior "gods" around him. His desert is Eden; the charm of the movie is to make that believable. Jaime Uys, the Afrikaan film-maker, who wrote, produced, and directed *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, and 20th Century Fox, which released it here, deserve credit, not demonstrations for bringing N!xaw to us.

TOM O'BRIEN

(As of last issue, Tom O'Brien became Commonweal*'s regular movie critic.)*

Media

FEEDING OUR MYTHS

"TO SAVE OUR SCHOOLS" FLUNKS

IT WAS INEVITABLE. A year of reports about the crisis of American public schooling has culminated in a three-hour television special. Broadcast nationally on September 4, 1984, ABC's "To Save Our Schools, To Save Our Children" was the product of a year's research in four cities, and rounded up all the usual prestigious experts. It was, in large measure, a filmed version of *A Nation at Risk,* the report prepared by the National Commission on Excellence in Education; *Action for Excellence,* issued by the National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth; *Making the Grade,* from a Twentieth Century Fund Task Force; and *America's Competitive Challenge,* from the Business-Higher Education Forum. There were, however, some welcome differences: greater attention, for example, to the question of teachers' salaries and generally to the costs of improvements and the unlikelihood that they can be achieved without federal assistance. Also welcome was an emphasis on the threat of a two-tier system of schooling — one for the middle class and one for the poor (always shown, however, as black and Hispanic although the majority of America's poor are white). So too was its franker acknowledgment that society is speaking, as Ernest Boyer at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching puts it, "out of two sides of its mouth." Society demands that schools stick to "basics" — or, in the loftier version, to "academics" — while simultaneously relying on the school more than ever to be custodian and nurturer of children who increasingly lack other social sources of support. These departures from the written reports are distinctly for the better, and as a schoolteacher I suppose I should be comforted by all this attention. In reality, "To Save Our Schools" left me somewhere between a state of advanced discouragement and numb despair.

Each of the three segments — on students, on teachers, on community response was preceded by a barrage of dramatic and uninterrupted statistics, the kind intended to alarm rather than inform. From all three segments, however, we get a clear idea of who and what's to blame for today's educational difficulties:

- working mothers, who no longer maintain the "snugly intact" families of the fifties but have bought their freedom at the price "of children left alone";
- a hedonistic youth culture featuring drugs and outside distractions including TV;
- "frustrated and stressed" teachers, demoralized by these "unwilling-to-learn" students, plus low pay;
- the fight over segregation, which disrupted once tranquil schools;
- teachers' strikes and unionism, which has fostered mediocrity;
- "lowered standards."

Thanks to these factors, "our entire national future" is at stake. We are an "imperiled nation" and teaching is an "imperiled profession." We are witnessing the "twilight of excellence." The nation is being threatened by a split between the haves and have-nots of unprecedented proportions. Schools are no longer the common cement between citizens, lifting successive generations into the middle classes.

Each of these particulars could be challenged or at least seriously qualified. The vast majority of working mothers, for instance, are not out there to exercize their new-found freedom but because they must work for their families. The documentary's use of two upper-middle-class children mysteriously left to fend for themselves in their isolated suburban mansions, is a dubious way to build a case about the changing family. Furthermore, it might be interesting to ponder that those healthy teenagers of the fifties were the offspring of working women who manned our offices and factories during and shortly after World War II. And the young children raised by the stay-at-home mothers of the fifties grew up to be those spoiled and much-maligned kids of the sixties! Is it time for a moratorium on blaming women for not being there when they're needed? It's a subject guaranteed to create cheap guilt, not reflection and insight. (While the section on the changing family asserts a clearcut cause-and-effect connection between mothers working and children's lowered achievement, the relationship between TV-watching and achievement is presented in a nuanced and informative manner.)

The woes voiced by the teachers in "To Save Our Schools" ring true — but are they so new? The high-school English teacher's plea is heart-rending: if only they would "please look at me" with real interest. . . . But it is a refrain teachers have been chanting for generations. If teachers are burnt out now in alarming numbers, nothing we see here helps us understand why, nothing in their classrooms suggests the kind of breakdown of morale and discipline the documentary bemoans. The quick scenarios mostly show children working silently alone, dutifully listening, or acting as though they were. Yet, there is disorder in some classes. When was there not?

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Neither the documentary nor the teachers interviewed — most of whom are leaving the profession — have any doubts that they are good teachers, although they leave me with some. The filmmakers seem to project the problems raised by these despairing teachers onto their unions, particularly in a long and unbalanced attack on the National Education Association. One wonders whether the status and burn-out rate of teachers are notably different in the school districts (one out of every four) without unions.

The documentary also creates something of a double bind when it warns, on the one hand, against a two-tier educational system and then, on the other hand, traces so many school problems to the turmoil surrounding integration, which was, after all, an effort to alter the race-based and class-based schooling that was long the norm. The film refers to the former glories of Kansas City's Southwest High, once the best in the city and not coincidentally located in an upper-middle-class neighborhood. Integration and the accompanying difficulties drove out thousands of its usual clientele and replaced them with thousands of lower-income and minority students. That may have changed Southwest High but, as the commentator notes, it also increased the number of black students going to college and aspiring to professions. Is this a tale of educational decline, or success — or both? The diagnosis, with its nearly Marxist focus on broad social ills, is dramatic but questionable. The prescription — more standardized tests for students, competency exams for teachers, perhaps better pay for all teachers but certainly merit pay for some — is predictable and paltry. If we are to seek solutions in the schools rather than society at large, then we need to know more about schools than this TV documentary offers. It feeds our shallowest myths and nostalgia, but fails to look closely and carefully at what actually happens in classrooms and why teaching might be exciting. To reform our schools we need to know them better.

The hero of ABC's portrayal of Southwest High is an amiable, appealing middle-class white student. His old junior high school buddies are no longer with him — they went to private schools. They keep asking him, he laughingly tells us, whether Southwest isn't a "dangerous place," and of course it isn't, he keeps telling them, but they're hard to convince. They are badly misinformed. By whom?

His situation is familiar. How often have people gaped in amazement when I told them I taught in Harlem, and my children attended largely minority inner-city schools. They imagined us daily fighting off violence. Yet in sixteen years of working in a variety of inner-city Manhattan schools, I've never witnessed serious violence against adults. This is surely a matter of luck, but it also suggests that such violence is not a daily part of the scene. (Where does the nightmare picture come from, and what harm is perpetrated by it?)

Actually several recent polls reveal reserves of positive feeling toward public schools on the part of both parents and teachers, belying both ABC's view and the common myths. But even more striking is the way people who have children in public schools view that system more favorably than people who don't — and view their children's own schools more positively than the "other schools" out there. Indeed, I sometimes regret how positively!

A part of teachers' despair comes from the way schools are perceived by the public — including their friends and relatives — and the teacher's association with a failing, violence-ridden system.

The absence of any historical perspective, so noticeable in "To Save Our Schools," is surely another major part of the problem. Our own memories are selective, especially when they reach back to a time when most Americans did not expect to graduate from high school. Were the graduates who went into teaching from state normal colleges a generation ago the "brightest and the best"? How much did the quality and retention of teachers depend on the absence of other options for young women? Were teachers in the 1950s afflicted with fewer or more nonacademic and demeaning tasks — lunch duty, hall patrol, etc.? What happened to poor teachers before unionization? Was there once a "common" education for all? The split between the able and the others, between rich and poor is not new. Certainly by high school the two-tier system was always operative. Rereading old biographies and novels can be a healthy reminder of the disobedience, unruliness, and even violence that existed in the schools of yore. Try even the sweetly nostalgic series by Laura Ingalls Wilder for a taste of what teachers had to contend with in many American communities.

Divided into segments on students, teachers, and community response, "To Save Our Schools" never manages to focus on the life of classrooms themselves, on the curriculum and on the teaching. Some children speak but largely to repeat the adults' themes. We're shown a few really sad and confused students, the kind that existed when I began teaching just as they do now. A teacher's efforts to make a young black boy pronounce "ask" according to standard American pronunciation (instead of "aks") is an unintentional reminder of how schools add to children's fearful confusion about their own worth and about the value of education. The faces of the children in Class 44, who have not had a regular teacher all year, living off an endless succession of substitutes, provide perhaps the most haunting memory. That one sequence might have justified the whole three hours.

Perhaps one reason the filmmakers do not dwell on classroom life is because they can't imagine it could be interesting, and suspect the rest of us can't either; perhaps also because we can only tell good classrooms from bad classrooms by their standardized test scores. Otherwise we don't know what to look for. It is precisely such circumstances that lend tests their awesome power to mindlessly determine both curriculum and teaching methods, Prepackaged programs with detailed test-directed scripts are increasingly attractive to a public ignorant of school realities and seeking guaranteed improvements. It is a trend that reports like this unwittingly encourage.

If the biggest problem is attracting the brightest and the best into teaching, we can't wait to solve the family crisis, nor to eliminate youth culture or TV. We could, however, try to communicate why teaching and the life of the classroom can be

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compelling. Teaching can be a profession of immense variety, autonomy, community, and a sense of usefulness, a setting in which one's own interests are valued — because it is from the stuff of one's own interests that teaching at its best emerges.

Rarely are there moments in this film which capture, even in passing, what might make teaching and schools wonderful and interesting. Granted such teaching is not an everyday event in most places, but it does occur, and a discerning film is needed to give this to us. For unless we can hold this alternative reality, even temporarily, in our heads, we have no capacity for substantial change.

DEBORAH MEIER

(Deborah Meier is founder and principal of Central Park East School, a special public elementary school in East Harlem.)

Books: A NEW OXFORD ETHIC

REASONS AND PERSONS
Derek Parfit
Oxford/Clarendon Press, $29.95, 543 pp.

Frederick Ferré

THIS is a book of ideas, but it begins as a pleasant physical experience. The book's size, its weighty feel, its good binding and clear typography all commend it. So, on thumbing through, does the carefully prepared scholarly apparatus: a five-page analytical table of contents, ten appendices, twenty-eight pages of notes, a rich bibliography, and an index. Perhaps the most arresting initial impression is made by the photograph on the cover of the dust jacket, showing a boat setting out from harbor in the misty dawn. It is the author's own photography, and it expresses his philosophical enterprise, also captured in an epigraph by Nietzsche placed opposite the title page:

> At last the horizon appears free to us again, even granted that it is not bright; at last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our sea*, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea."

What Derek Parfit wants in this book is to make a new beginning for ethics, venturing out, in the radical absence of religious authority, to find a reasonable replacement for our civilization's conceptions of what we persons are and what principles should guide our private and communal lives. In the course of his argument he rejects not only religious dogma, which on the whole he considers not worth discussing, but also the secular orthodoxies of self-interest theories, which he discusses at length and in detail.

The genius of this book is indeed in its detail. Parfit's style of reasoning is at the same time elaborate, rigorous, and highly imaginative. Unfortunately, sometimes, especially early in the book, he gets trapped in his own over-complex style of reasoning, which typically embeds multiple conditionals and negatives, e.g., "Since this is so, it cannot be true that we will cause these aims to be best achieved only if we do not follow this theory." And on at least two occasions he inadvertently reverses his meaning by using what, in context, turns out to be one "not" too many, e.g. "If we are not Consequentialists, we shall be likely to believe that Clare's act would not have been not wrong." I was inclined at the start to come down rather hard on such needless obfuscation, and I remain afraid that many readers will give up somewhere in the first fifty pages.

That would, however, be a shame. There are riches upon riches for those who persevere. The principal benefit, besides the sheer mental enlargement that comes from considering Parfit's profusion of fascinating hypothetical examples (more entertaining than most science fiction), is the massive and, in my judgment, conclusive assault on self-interest as the presumed "only reasonable" policy for individuals and societies. Parfit shows from several angles that it is not always reasonable to do what is "best for you." He deftly handles various forms of Prisoner's Dilemma problems and expands them to the level of society at large. The implications for public policy with regard to pollution, population, and war are made abundantly clear. If policy-makers the world over could be convinced by this book, we would have grounds to hope for a safer future.

Another intimately related issue is the question of what persons are. Selfishness as the ultimate policy for life is made even more unreasonable if selves are themselves shown not to be ultimates. Parfit's extended treatment of personal identity is aimed at destroying the belief that there is some "further fact" about us (a soul, or the like) that matters in addition to the tapestry of physical and psychological relations that constitute us. This is where he employs his fecund imagination best of all, with profusions of thought-experiments that must finally lay the Cartesian ghost to rest. He calls his view the Reductionist position, which I find an unfortunate label; but I think the position correct. It is, as he notes, the Buddha's view, and it is the view taken by "process" philosophers who follow Alfred North Whitehead's account of things.

It is frustrating that Oxford philosophers like Parfit tend to have so few resources beyond the range of their normal conversation-partners and such a narrow repertoire in the history of philosophy. Parfit is immensely ingenious, but his palette of philosophical options is limited. He discusses time, for example, without seeming aware that there are many more important options than he considers. Is the "passage" of time across events merely an illusion, he asks, or does it really pass? On neither option can he see why there is any moral difference between future events, not yet

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lit by time's searchlight, and past or present ones. He never considers the possibility that temporal becoming involves the actual creating of events rather than the mere revealing of them. Again a knowledge of Whitehead would have widened Parfit's horizons and would inevitably have affected his ethical analysis.

The book ends on an unresolved note, looking for, but not finding, a "Theory X" that will interpret how individual persons defined as societies of occasions (to use Whitehead's language rather than Parfit's reductionist terminology) should be conceived in communal terms. I found this ending both winsome for its honesty and a challenge for continued "venturing." Perhaps what Parfit needs most is a more adequate theory of reality, one that includes time, physical events, living organisms, and human institutions in a comprehensive vision. His virtuosity in ethical theory needs a better metaphysical ground before Theory X can be developed. Whitehead's way is one possibility. Ironically, if this way is taken it will lead Parfit not necessarily to traditional religion but to an organismic conception of the universe which includes a theoretical place for God as the final context for all reasons and persons. Parfit is just leaving the harbor. It will be fascinating to follow his voyage.

Belloc: the hyperbolic mentor

HILAIRE BELLOC

A.N. Wilson
Atheneum, $17.95, 386 pp.

Clyde F. Crews

HILAIRE BELLOC was once in attendance at Mass at Westminster Cathedral and remained standing, French-fashion, throughout the service. A sacristan came up to him and whispered, "Excuse me, sir, we kneel here." Belloc replied, "Go to hell." "I'm sorry, sir," said the sacristan, "I didn't know you were a Catholic."

Everyone who *knew* Belloc also knew that he was a Catholic from the cradle, of the scrapping, contentious, and not infrequently obnoxious sort. His was a personality that could mingle a keen theological appreciation of incarnational, sacramental, and moral instincts with eyebrow-lifting impieties. As a twenty-six-year-old making his first trip through America, he wrote of the capital city of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania: "This place is ugly. God made it the night after a debauch when His ideas were neither many nor interesting.... Here I lecture to horrible people."

There is no doubt about it: in life and in death, Hilaire Belloc has never failed to fascinate people. The new biography by A.N. Wilson, styled definitive by the publisher, makes a steady and studied attempt to plumb the sources of the intrigue. In a readable, well-paced text, the author, literary editor of the *Spectator*, novelist and biographer of Milton, shows us the bright and dark sides of Belloc, contemporary and friend to the likes of Chesterton, Shaw, and Wells.

To capture either the man or the fascination with him is a tall order. Belloc (1870-1953) wrote over 150 prose works. They didn't sell well in their time and are all but unobtainable today. As Wilson admits, the aggressively pre-conciliar Mr. Belloc, extraordinarily smug in his European cultural Catholicism, wrote what most Catholics today would consider not only "nonsense," but "violent and vitriolic" nonsense as well.

Belloc, who sat in the British Parliament in the years shortly before the First World War, was to interpret that war ultimately as a struggle between Catholicism and Barbarism. Within the church, for all its troubles, Belloc perceived roof and hearth. Outside of it — and he meant outside the specifically *Roman* Catholic expression of it — all else was Night.

In particular, Belloc is remembered for his "robustly anti-Jewish statements" that continued throughout his life. As early as the 1890s, Belloc had been, according to Dean Inge, about the only man in England who did not support the Jewish Colonel Dreyfus in the scandalous anti-Semitic affair that rocked France. More of Belloc's "disastrous habit of backing the wrong horse," as Wilson describes it. Belloc himself always maintained, publicly at least, that he was a true friend of the Jewish people. Critically-minded readers may want to take up his 1922 text *The Jews* and decide for themselves.

In a carefully nuanced panegyric delivered in Westminster Cathedral in August, 1953, Father Ronald Knox had said of Belloc that conflict was his destiny. He played out that manifest destiny again in the late 1920s by being one of the few who relentlessly took up academic arms against H.G. Wells for the anti-religious drift of the mighty best-seller *The Outline of History*.

In his study, Mr. Wilson has been able to draw on new source materials and thus supplement Robert Speaight's fine and careful biography of 1957. Wilson takes on, in a way that I, at least, did not find in Speaight, the hard question of why Belloc has not ultimately "survived" as, say, Chesterton has. The analysis is clear, crisp, and concise.

There are some small annoyances; a need, perhaps for a little more fine-tuning on historical context. While Cardinal Henry Manning had an influence on Leo XIII's writing, of course, to say that *Rerum Novarum* "was really written by Manning" is probably to say too much. The very precise and carefully edited 1978 *Church in a Secularized Society* by Roger Aubert (Volume Five in the Christian Centuries series) lists Liberatore and Zigliara as primary writers of that landmark document.

Also, a single editorial addition about the post-conciliar church by the author might well be welcome. Repeated, short comments throughout the volume can run the risk of becoming intrusive: Manning's presbytery "since despoiled by modernist priests"; Roman Catholic pulpits today "are themselves hardly ever used"; Pius XII, "last of orthodox popes." Additionally, in a volume that seeks to be definitive, a bibliography would most likely be in order, even though it is to be found in Speaight.

Belloc, for all his hideous exaggera-

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tion, poor historical craftsmanship, and sometimes thoughtless bravado, remains a mentor to later ages in his conviction that rebuttal and intellectual fisticuffs can be effective ways of loving and serving both the truth and those who seek it with a sincere heart. A.N. Wilson's biography brings this lesson effectively forward, while manifesting for all to see the complexities and caveats associated with the life and thought of Hilaire Belloc.

It is no mean task to take on the life of a man who in 1910 published a long essay under the title *On Everything*. Wilson has shouldered his task well.

Correspondence

(Continued from page 514)

which acknowledges the workers and, in the third world the poor, as the dynamic element of modern society and hence calls for "the solidarity of workers and with workers" and, in the same paragraph, for "the solidarity of the poor and with the poor." According to John Paul II, the church itself must be in solidarity with the poor struggling for integral liberation.

In his liberation theory Gutiérrez has been in dialogue with Marxism and made use of some analytical tools derived from Marxism, but he has significantly transformed these notions and created an original Catholic approach. I have argued elsewhere that his theological effort was so successful that the key concepts of his theology of liberation have been received in the church's official teaching in Latin America—and in Canada.

GREGORY BAUM

The author replies

Gregory Baum's letter emphasizes points on which I believe we are in basic agreement, despite differences in detail. I have praised Gutiérrez's theology for its anti-Marxism since it displays the anti-ideological nature of Christianity. I concur with Baum's important points that Gutiérrez's use of Marxist social analysis is very generic and is certainly subservient to his Christian ideals, for it transforms such analyses. I therefore wholeheartedly subscribe to the *Concilium* statement that Baum, my wife Elisabeth, and others have authored and signed.

Nevertheless, there are some differences. I contend that Gutiérrez's social analysis would become much more nuanced if he would take into account two very specific neo-Marxist critiques of traditional Marxism: Bloch's retrieval of the bourgeois culture, in particular, the significance of rights language, and Habermas's reconstruction of the traditional Marxist conception of historical development. To argue that others, liberals, neo-Marxists, and even churchmen, have pointed to the negative relations of dependency does not respond to the crucial issue: whether it would be necessary for liberation theology to take into account criticisms of the theory of dependency as an adequate theoretical explanation. I raise this issue not to deny the existence of relations of dependency, but to emphasize that autonomy is much more than the overcoming of relations of dependency, and that the task of liberation theology is consequently much more complex.

Second: a difference exists between the preferential option for the poor and the claim that the oppressed have some special epistemological status or hermeneutical privilege. The latter claim is a much stronger claim. It rightfully takes seriously the social conditioning of knowledge. Yet it raises the question of how the experience and knowledge of a particular group relates to the wider society. The question of the relation of the basic communities to the universal church is raised by Ratzinger's letter — theologically significant and legitimate. That question is distinct from the preferential option for the poor.

Liberation theologians are threatened by death squads or by expulsion from their homeland. According to some news reports, Ratzinger sought not only to raise questions, but also to use institutional and coercive force against several theologians by removing them from teaching positions. He prevailed against two, and has allegedly sought the same fate for Gutiérrez. That is most unfortunate. For instead of using his office to teach and to raise questions, he is resorting to institutional power. Such actions place those of us sympathetic to liberation theology in a difficult situation. To raise questions and to tender criticisms can appear to support the institutional violence against liberation theologians rather than to dialogue with them to develop, to modify, and to defend their positions in the public forum. It is in this latter spirit that I have raised my questions. I think it is especially important for any advocacy stance not to rely primarily upon the uniqueness or righteousness of the experience underlying its advocacy, but to engage in discourse, and to take into account the criticisms brought against it.

FRANCIS SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA

Class act

South Bend, Ind.

To the Editors: I would like you to know that I have read/subscribed to *Commonweal* since 1943. I was then a student in Abigail Quigley McCarthy's English class at the College of St. Catherine and *Commonweal* was a class requirement. Except for a few lean years, I have subscribed as a long-time reader and friend.

MARJORIE SHELLEY

Scholarly erosion

Silver Spring, Md.

To the Editors: This is to urge you to continue an interest in dialogue with Thomas Sheehan and his argument [August 10] that Catholic theologians are posing problems for the faith. I am not a Catholic. I like Hans Küng, both in the book Sheehan reviewed (*Eternal Life?*)

REVIEWERS

FREDERICK FERRÉ *is the head of the department of philosophy and religion at the University of Georgia. His books include* Language, Logic, and God, *recently reissued by the University of Chicago Press.*

FATHER CLYDE F. CREWS *recently published English Catholic Modernism (University of Notre Dame Press), and chairs the department of theology at Louisville's Bellarmine College.*

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and also others. But Sheehan raised a valid issue for discussion that goes beyond a concern for Catholics. It is one that applies to "Christians" generally. At least to those who are not fundamentalists.

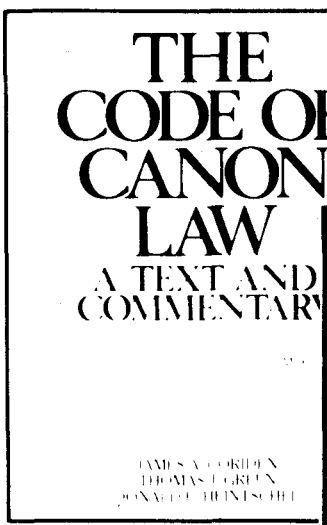
The issue simply is that in pursuing fully modern biblical scholarship, Catholic theologians—like Protestants earlier—have eroded radically one of the primary grounds for faith: the Bible, and particularly the New Testament. Neither David Tracy nor Andrew Greeley handled Sheehan well at all. Indeed neither directly addressed his point or the significance of it. Tracy, reluctant to debate, seemed to say that Catholic theologians do differ with one another, and that whatever they find—or do not find out—about the Jesus of "history" it has no necessary effect on their Christ of faith. That ignores Sheehan's point about circularity which will not permit such an easy defense of faith. And Greeley, after insisting that faith is not a scientific matter, unaccountably kept opting for a scientific mode of justifying faith—as an option that takes care of more of the data. He must know that faith operates in situations where, in the nature of the case, one never gets all the data in. His final colloquial declaration that God damn well better be maternal, may be a ringing appeal to some constituency or another, but it was no argument.

Sheehan was not arguing for any return to a fundamentalism, or for Catholic theologians to go back into any previous state of inhibited scholarship. But if the New Testament gets eviscerated from any historical ground for the faith, the tradition must look for some other on which to validate itself. It is no new idea that the church wrote the book by which it authenticates itself but this circularity does not make much difference if one can believe that the church has indeed recovered, with whatever variations in emphasis or separate perspective of witnesses, enough of the "true" history to be authentic in establishing Jesus Christ as one who can be considered a "divine" spokesman with a divine, and hence trustworthy, promise. The faith may not die if the biblical base is eroded, but it needs more of a foundation than contemporary theology, either Catholic or Protestant is developing.

From a different perspective, Harvey Cox makes a similar point in *Religion in the Secular City*. While one need not—not I anyway—accept all of Professor Cox's theses in this volume, his indictment of the liberal scholarship of academe (theological, i. e.) as anemic, is a fair caricature. There is nothing in it to revive a faith or convert a skeptic.

In a much broader context, the lay Catholic and Nobel Laureate, Czeslaw Milosz, has sympathized with the problems of contemporary Catholic theologians in adjusting across a whoel broad spectrum of scientific scholarship and what it has wrought on culture, but feels that the response has been weak and one of retreat, in the language of socialists of 100 years ago, to a position of opposing materialism only by a leap to some future through political action.

These are issues of moment that ask for thoughful reflections, not simplistic defensiveness or parochial apologetics. I



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am sure you can find someone with the scholarship and temperament to do it. Since we have been some considerable time coming to this impasse and it appears will be sometime working it out, it may be that one is looking more for a greater illumination of the issues at present than a solution. If so, that will be a help.

In any case, Sheehan was not frivolous. Greeley was, and Tracy was just pedantic. So give it another go.

CHARLES W. PHILLIPS

A dismantle piece

Houston, Tex.

To the Editors: The question posed by Thomas Sheehan [August 10] with regard to contemporary Catholic theology is not that of whether Catholicism has been dismantled by the historico-critical method, but that of whether Catholicism is being dismantled by method *per se*. Such a dismantling of Catholicism by Catholic theologians needs to be stated clearly, if only because it seems not to be understood at all by either David Tracy or Andrew Greeley. It is, on the contrary, strikingly exemplified in both of their responses to Sheehan.

Tracy's response seems to consist of two parts. First, the so-called liberal consensus does not agree, as Sheehan supposes, on what method(s) theologians ought to employ. Second, Catholic theologians trust tradition as the principal mediator of faith. The second of these points seems, on its own merits, sufficient to refute Sheehan, until one reads further: "What is new in modern Catholic theology is a greater recognition that the tradition which is fundamentally trusted as the mediator of this faith is also, like all traditions, ambiguous and thereby in constant need of correction and self-reform" (428). If Catholic tradition is "Like all traditions," i.e., "ambiguous" and in need of correction and reform, then we are able to trust it only to the degree to which we are able to trust any other tradition. Catholic tradition does not enjoy a unique trustworthiness. Furthermore, we are forced, as Tracy says, to look outside the tradition for sources which can be brought to bear on correcting or reforming it. What are the sources we can trust? Well, historico-critical method, for one. But there are others, Tracy hastens to add. There are a host of methodologies which the theologian can tap in interpreting "the various authorities in church and tradition" and in reinterpreting the tradition itself (429). Two problems are immediately apparent. We are being asked to "trust" the theological methodologies to correct, reform, and reinterpret the tradition, the church and the Magisterium. And we are being asked to accept the theologian as interpreter and reinterpreter of tradition. With regard to the first, the church has never accepted the proposition that the tradition, the Magisterium, or the church herself are obliged to submit to the methods of theologians. With regard to the second, the Magisterium has traditionally and formally held that the task of interpreting the tradition resides solely with the Magisterium and is not shared with the theological academy.

Greeley would apparently have us believe that the uniqueness of Catholicism lies in its ability to spin a better story than anyone else. The historical accuracy of the story is, according to Greeley, beside the point (432). Whether or not the story speaks to experience is what really matters. But whose experience are we talking about? And, in a fallen world (supposing, of course, that the world is historically and concretely fallen), how reliable is experience? Apart from the sacramental worship of the church, what "experience" can we trust? Once again, in Greeley, we see how the tradition (story) is forced to submit to an external criterion (generic human experience). The analogy which Greeley employs, comparing Catholic symbols and stories to scientific hypotheses, reveals the flaw in his thinking. The revelation (tradition, symbols, stories) is not the hypothesis. The revelation is the datum. Theological syntheses are hypothetical and subject to change; the revelation itself is not. That, at least, is what Catholicism has traditionally understood to be the case. To reduce the Christian revelation to a model, subject to "the criteria of religious model fitting" (433) is to dehis-

(Continued on page 543)

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toricize our faith, in short, to dimantle Catholicism.

After reading these two responses to Thomas Sheehan, we are well within our rights to ask—David Tracy and Andrew Greeley, won't you please come home?

DR. JOYCE A. LITTLE

One kind word

Chickasha, Okla.

To the Editors: Thank you for providing a forum for articles of the caliber of David Tracy's and Andrew M. Greeley's responses to Thomas Sheehan's pessimistic attack on the imaginary monolith he calls "liberal consensus."

It is this kind of public disputation which gives me renewed faith in the continued vitality of the *Ecclesia semper reformanda*. There is only one sure way, I suspect, to kill off Catholicism once and for all: by confusing the models of science and religion; by forcing *one* theological method, *one* kind of ecclesiastical self-understanding upon a living and evolving organism which draws its strength precisely from the multiplicity of God-in-self and self-in-God revelation and casts its rationally-intuitive insights in analogical language.

If professors Tracy and Greeley (despite the latter's modest disclaimer) are examples of the maligned "liberal consensus," more power to them!

DR. INGRID H. SHAFER

Shared errors

Gaithersburg, Md.

To the Editors: Jerzy Krzyzanowski's review of Czeslaw Milosz's *The History of Polish Literature* [August 10] repeats the standard Polish accusation about "Poland's geographical location between Germany and Russia . . . whose aggressive appetites spelt doom for Poland."

It was very true that when Poland was weak and its neighbors strong (as at the end of the eighteenth century, and in 1939) the latter partitioned its territory. It was no less true that when Poland was strong and its neighbors weak, the process was reversed. Polish nationalists were never content with the legitimate Polish ethnic area, but always made "historic" claims to huge chunks of ethnically non-Polish land, on the east, west, and north.

Examples of this Polish reverse-play: the Poland of 1772 comprised such a heterogeneous conglomeration of territories that less than half its population was ethnically Polish. Poland, as restored after World War I, though less geographically grandiose, was still no less than one-third non-Polish (Ukrainian, Byelorussian, German, Jewish, Lithuanian). Post-World War II Poland exhibited its own aggressive appetite, incorporating one-fifth of Germany, displacing nine million German inhabitants (including three million German Catholics).

The dismal nationality conflicts in east-central Europe witnessed mistakes, injustices, crimes, and much that can only be called childish stupidity on all sides. Chauvinism and imperialistic expansion was not the monopoly of any one nation as Mr. Krzyzanowski implies.

PAUL W. HATZFELDT

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Religion: *The Quiet Strength of Liberation Theology* by Christine Gudorf . . . *Thomas Sheehan's End of Catholicism* by David Tracy, Andrew Greeley, Thomas Sheehan, the Editors, and Correspondence . . . *Guatemala's War Against the Church* by Gordon L. Bowen . . . *The Oxford Legacy* by David B. Noble . . . *Liturgical Renewal Twenty Years Later* by Patrick W. Collins.

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